

The World's Wisest Fool Explains Life Under The Sun

Eccl. 1:1-15

Modern Americans have given into the secular vision of life. We are enamored by the world and the things that are in it, with little to no regard for God or the judgement to come. We assume that such things have no relevance to us as we live out our days under the sun.

This point of view has gained a lot of traction, not because it is reasonable, but because we think it frees us to do whatever we want. John Lennon captures the sentiment: *Imagine there's no heaven, It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people, Living for today...*

It may surprise you, but that is the point of view explored in the book of Ecclesiastes. The difference between Lennon and Solomon is this. Solomon didn't just smoke some weed, and write feel good songs about living for today. Solomon actually pushed the theory of a life lived without reference to God all the way out to its logical conclusion. He sought to discover what a significance a world without God would have.

Over the next few weeks we are going to follow him on this quest to see where it leads. But I must warn you from the start. It is going to lead into some dead ends. It's going to take us to some dark places. For some of you it's going to shatter some illusions and be quite disorienting.

Why would God put a book like this in the Bible? I think the best answer is that Ecclesiastes is a Trojan horse. Some books of the Bible are a full frontal assault on the gates of worldliness. For example, 1 Jn 2:15 says, "*Do not love the world or the things of the world!...*" But in Ecclesiastes we watch someone who lived for the world come to the realization that such a life was a meaningless waste. So, the Holy Spirit's purpose for the book and mine for leading us through it is to break the spell that the world has on us. That we would see through it and set our hearts on something far greater.

There is a happiness that worldly people can have, but it is a fragile happiness. They are never more than one phone call or doctors visit or life crisis away from utter despair. I want something more for you. I want you to have an abiding joy that the world cannot take from you, because the world did not give it to you.

- I. V.1 The Author of Eccl. Has quite a resume: *The Preacher, The Son of David, The King in Jerusalem.*
 - A. King Solomon's is clearly in view.
 - 1. For some of you that doesn't mean anything so let me put it like this: If Bill Gates, Albert Einstein and Hugh Hefner somehow merged into one person, who was also Pope and the President you would have Solomon.
 - 2. Here's what we know about Him:
 - a. When his father David died, Solomon asked God for the wisdom to rule the nation well and God granted his request (1Kings 3:5-15).
 - b. He oversaw the construction of the temple and a palace complex

that took a total of 20yrs to complete.

- c. The glory of Solomon's kingdom was astonishing.
 - (1) Enormous Wealth
 - (2) Powerful Military (Thousands of Horses & Chariots)
 - (3) Agricultural & Architectural Advancements
 - (4) Literary & Artistic Achievements:
 - (a) He wrote 3,000 proverbs, and composed 1,005 songs (1Kings 4:32).
 - (b) Rulers from all over came to inquire of His wisdom. (e.g. The Queen of Sheba 1Kings 10:1-7).
- d. But Solomon grew corrupt. He violated the regulations God had given for kings to follow in Deut. 17 which forbade him to collect 3 things:
 - (1) wives
 - (2) wealth
 - (3) war machines
- e. Solomon disregarded God's word in all three:
 - (1) 700 wives, 300 Concubines (1kings 11:1-8)
 - (2) His excess ruined his kingdom resulting in it being divided
 - (3) Solomon became "*History's Wisest Fool.*" - Driscoll

3. Tradition holds that Eccl. Was written by elderly, repentant Solomon, reflecting on his life's experiences and passing on to young readers, the lessons learned.

B. So the message of Eccl. Is exceedingly relevant for our time:

- 1. Though we are not kings, we are a free people, with enormous wealth and endless opportunities to pursue our pleasures, our dreams, our causes and our careers.
- 2. Most of us believe that in these pursuits we will find enduring happiness and lasting satisfaction.
- 3. Solomon stands on our path, warning us that regardless of how enthused we may feel in the moment about our idol of the month, we are only setting ourselves up for disappointment and disillusionment.

II. V.2 introduces A Key Term - **Vanity** (Heb. *hebel*) A word with many shades of meaning.

- A. Literally - *breath* or *vapor*, but is translated as: *vanity, meaningless, fleeting, passing, superficial, obscure, enigmatic, absurd.*
- B. Rather than trying to settle on one, it is best to realize that the original word is a complex word with many shades of meaning and is best understood by translating it in a variety of ways based on the context. (Ps. 39:5; Ps. 144:4; Pr. 31:30; Eccl 2:11,17; 6:12; 11:10; Jas 4:14)

III. The Quest V. 3 *What does man gain by all the toil, at which he toils under the sun?*

- A. Gain/Profit - what ultimately do we get out of all our labor?
 - 1. All our sweating, all our thinking, striving, competing, worrying
 - 2. What does it accomplish, what is the point?

- B. You ask this question in the small things.
 - 1. If I said, meet me in the parking lot at 5:30AM tomorrow. You would ask *why? What's the point? What's in it for me?*
 - 2. Yet we don't ask the same questions about the totality of our lives!
- C. Then there is a extremely important qualifying phrase: **Under The Sun** (v.3) - used 30X in the book.
 - 1. It means that Solomon is looking at life from an earthly perspective. He is asking:
 - a. What conclusions must we reach if we limit our search for meaning to what we can observe with our five senses, and deduce by human reason.
 - b. It would include the following three limitations:
 - (1) No judgment or evaluation from God about how we lived our life.
 - (2) No consciousness after death (reward or punishment).
 - (3) No special revelation from God.
 - 2. In other words, if this short life we live under the sun is all there is. If there is nothing beyond, above or outside. How then should we live and what sense can we make of it all?
 - a. Do you see how relevant this is to us today?
 - b. If we want to live our lives without reference to God, we must be prepared to ask the obvious question - *What permanent value is your life?*

IV. Having clarified his task and set the parameters, Solomon begins with a poem that highlights the sense of despair inherent in a secular worldview (VV. 4-11).

- A. V. 4 - The generations come & they go while the world remains.
 - 1. There is a real irony here, that the careful Bible student will appreciate.
 - a. Gen. 1:28 tells us that God created mankind to rule and have dominion over the earth.
 - b. Yet we see that the earth remains while it's masters suddenly dissolve into dust.
 - 2. Another 70's song captures the haunting problem of the seeming permanence of the world in contrast to the fleeting days of our lives. *I close my eyes, only for a moment, and the moment's gone All my dreams pass before my eyes, a curiosity Dust in the wind All they are is dust in the wind Same old song, just a drop of water in an endless sea All we do crumbles to the ground though we refuse to see Dust in the wind All we are is dust in the wind Now, don't hang on, nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky It slips away And all your money won't another minute buy.*
- B. VV. 5-8 Our lives are mirrored by the cycles of nature:
 - 1. The **Sun** gets up every morning and works hard all day, goes to bed and the hustles back to do it again tomorrow.
 - a. Today: Do the dishes/Laundry/Grass
 - b. Tomorrow: Do the dishes/Laundry/Grass

2. The **Wind** full of sound and furry. Rushing like nobody's business from N to S, then a little while latter it comes rushing back the other way.
 - a. Type up the Emails and click send.
 - b. Wait a minute and here come the responses back...
 - c. Ship the goods, Receive the goods.
 - d. Win the game, Lose the game.
 - e. Celebrate a birthday, attend a funeral
3. The **rivers** constantly empty into the sea, but the sea is never full.
 - a. Watch some tv, listen to some music, buy some furniture, make love, go on vacation, buy a new car, dress, house...
 - b. but it's never enough.
4. We try to break out of the monotony: job change, affairs, midlife crisis, ice cream, but its all just *chasing the wind*.
 - a. Teens - can't wait till get out of parents house - freedom
 - b. College - can't wait till through studying/testing - Job I love
 - c. Job - ugh Just need to find someone to love
 - d. Married - have kids and life would be complete
 - e. Promotion - have a bigger house, nicer vacations
 - f. "If I can just get *there*, things will be different, but when you do, nothing is different."
5. VV. 9-11 So, *there's nothing new under the sun*.
 - a. People object - "technology!"
 - (1) we Put a man on the moon - what did they do?
 - (2) Stood there and looked back at the earth. Got back in the ship, ate a sandwich and came home.
 - b. The more things change the more they stay the same: birth, growth, marriage, work, decline, death, forgotten.

- V. Does this sound depressing? Yes it does because worldliness *is* depressing. A godless world is Hell and secularism is real downer. Fortunately it isn't true.
- A. A greater king than Solomon has come and with Him something NEW!
 - B. God has broken through the ceiling. The Eternal One came down here and brought hope and meaning with Him.
 - C. Jesus is paying attention. He sees you, hears you, and judges you and that is why every word you say, decision you make, action you take matters.
 1. 2 Cor 5:10-11 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
 2. Those who trust and obey Him are promised abundant life, eternal life, and because that life is connected to this life, your labor and toil under the sun is not in vain!

Credits:

Mark Driscoll (Meaningless Life?)
Sam Storms (Blog Series)
Timothy Keller (A Reason For Living)
Derek Kidner (The Message of Ecclesiastes)