

Ecclesiastes

“A man’s got to know his limitations” – Dirty Harry

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The contrast between “under the sun” (worldly perspective) versus “under heaven” (Godly perspective). It describes the search for meaning and purpose in life, and thus how best to live: what is *the good*?

“Meaningless” is translated *vanity* in the KJV. It comes from the Aramaic “hebel” for breath, idol, something without substance, transient or fleeting.

The author’s conclusion (probably Solomon) is that God, as our chief end in life, gives meaning and purpose to living, and therefore should be the object and motivation for all that we do (Ecc. 12:13). The “teacher” is Solomon’s ploy to explore worldly wisdom and review his own folly in his youth.

Theme verses: 2:24; 3:14; 3:22, 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7

The Tension verse - 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” We know of eternity, but we are limited to our own small segment of time. This generates an inconsolable angst and nostalgia in our heart.

Eccl 2:24-25

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

Eccl 3:12-14

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil - this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

Eccl 3:22

So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

Eccl 5:18-20

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life that God has given him – for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

Eccl 8:15

So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

Eccl 9:7

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.

Outline:

Part I – Personal Experience

- Experience is meaningless 1:1-11
- Worldly wisdom is meaningless 1:12-18
- Pleasures are meaningless 2:1-3
- Worldly successes (fame and fortune) are meaningless 2:4-11
- Worldly wisdom and folly are meaningless 2:12-16
- Ambition and Failure are meaningless 2:17-23
- Storing up wealth is meaningless 2:26

Initial conclusion: Only God sustains us and gives us enjoyment (2:24).

Part II – Finite vs. Infinite points of view; Ecc. 3:1-22

Everything has its season. From dust we came, and to dust we will return. *Worry about today for you will be judged by how you spent it. God is in control, so be about your business without trying to figure out what God is up to.*

Part III – Private vs. Public Service; Ecc. 4

- Oppressing others just to display our power is worse than death. (v.1-3)
- Achievement born of envy is meaningless (v.4-6).
- But serving others for their benefit is both fruitful and rewarding (v.7-12).
- Public leaders shouldn't be chosen for their wealth, but for their wisdom. Either way, they're soon forgotten and disdained. Earthly kingdoms will all pass away (v.13-16).

Part IV – Earthly vs. Heavenly treasures; Ecc. 5

Only God has value, not our sacrifices to or for him. Wealth has no eternal value. But labor that produces tangible results has value to the laborer and it brings peace.

Part V – Earthly vs. Godly appetites; Ecc. 6-7

Man's appetite is for earthly rewards and control. But when they elude him he cannot find a pattern or reason for it. He thinks he knows what he wants, and what is best for him, but they are fleeting. Therefore we must observe without desire (6:9 – compare Jn. 15:19 “in the world, not of it”; Lk. 4:2,13 Jesus was strongest when he had the least). Chapter 7 enumerates the appetites that are vapors, the things we tend to value.

Part VI – Earthly vs. Godly justice; Ecc. 8-10

- There is no lasting justice in the world, no truly just leaders.
- Wickedness takes us prisoner (8:8).
- We think we act wisely, but when we compare what God has done we suddenly realize that we cannot comprehend the world at all (8:17).
- Evil reigns in the world (9:3)
- Yet life is worth living. Savor it. (9:4,7,9)
- The wisdom of the poor may be despised (9:16), but so was Christ. Value it anyway.
- Folly may outstrip wisdom and honor, fools may rule while princes are their slaves. Nonetheless, follow through on your efforts to ensure success and righteous fruit, understanding that in the short-term vagaries of this world, labor doesn't always produce just rewards (10:8-11). If things are right, count your blessings. It's rare.

Part VII – The lesson to be applied: a Code of Conduct – Ecc. 11-12

Don't use the expected outcome as the motive for what you do. In this world, the expected outcome may never arise. Instead do what is right because it is right, not because you expect to get something from it. Judgment is coming. God controls the outcome; we control the effort. We're judged by what we do, not by what we get.

Therefore, remember who God is before it's too late. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.