

Introducing the Words of the Preacher

What would a wise man say about the purpose of life?

Ecclesiastes 1.1

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • October 24, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2021

Scripture Reader and Reading: Billy Henshall – Ecclesiastes 12.9–10

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Aaron Gilder – No Suggestions

Prelude:

I. Who or what are preachers and what was a prophet?

- A. They have devoted their lives to
 - 1. teaching people knowledge,
 - 2. pondering and seeking out and setting in order many wise sayings,
 - 3. seeking acceptable words,
 - a) words that are upright—
 - b) even words of truth.
- B. Preachers devote their lives to
 - 1. speaking words that are like goads, and
 - 2. are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.
- C. This is no easy task, because
 - 1. they have found that reading many books has no end, and
 - 2. much study is wearisome to the flesh.
- D. Preachers persuade us that the most important thing in life is
 - 1. to fear God and to keep his commandments,
 - 2. knowing that such is our all, and
 - a) knowing further that God will bring every work into judgment,
 - b) including every secret thing,
 - c) whether good or evil.

II. I have introduced to you the words of the preacher, identified in the following:

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

– Ecclesiastes 1.1, 12

- A. When Solomon functioned as a preacher,
 - 1. he did well as a king, and
 - 2. he found fulfillment in life.
- B. When he ceased acting like a preacher,
 - 1. he found misery and depression.
 - 2. I want to show you what he discovered in life.
- C. I want to show you the meaning of life in the Book of Ecclesiastes.
 - 1. The Hebrew word for “Ecclesiastes” means
 - 2. someone who addresses an assembly,
 - a) which is why we translate it as “preacher.”

Persuasion:

I. A Unique Biblical Book

- A. There is no other Bible Book like these ponderings of King Solomon.
 - 1. He takes us on a journey.
 - 2. He takes us to the very places
 - a) where we think happiness, fulfillment, and meaning are,
 - b) only to show us that they all disappoint.
 - (1) Even if God gave us those things,
 - (2) they are all vanity,
 - (a) if we miss the most important thing in life.
 - (b) He will show us the single most important thing in life.
- B. Solomon pieces together his journey in a masterful way.

1. I agree with Leland Ryken:

The Book of Ecclesiastes is one of the greatest masterpieces in all of literature and also one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible.

– *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, p. 319

2. Ryken also quoted others who attested to the greatness of Ecclesiastes:

Herman Melville [who wrote *Moby Dick*, DR] called it “the truest of all books,” while the American novelist Thomas Wolfe described it as the “the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth” and “the greatest single piece of writing I have known.”

– *Ibid.*

II. Life Under the Sun

- A. “Under the sun” or “under heaven” appears 33 times in Ecclesiastes.
 1. If you view life strictly from *under* the sun,
 2. without any thought of what is *above* the sun,
 - a) with no regard for what is going on in *heaven*,
 - b) then Solomon shows the vanity of such a life.
- B. To live life with any world view other than a God-centered one proves vain.
 1. Listen to the contrast Solomon made in Ecclesiastes 2,
 - a) one right after the other about the same subject,
 - b) that of our employment:

18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled *under the sun*, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was *from the hand of God*.

– Ecclesiastes 2.18, 24

- (1) First, Solomon said he hated his labor,
- (2) then he said a man's soul should enjoy good in his labor.

2. What did he mean?

a) You have to see his frame of reference.

(1) In verse 18, he spoke of viewing life strictly from "under the sun."

(a) He thought of all that for which he worked, and then

(b) he would die,

i) leaving the results to the man who would come after him,

ii) referring to his own son.

(1) Would that man make his work better? Or

(2) would that man ruin his work?

(2) In verse 24, he spoke of labor as a gift from the hand of God.

(a) God is above or beyond the sun.

(b) When he kept that in mind,

i) he could enjoy the good of his labor under the sun.

ii) However, that did not negate what his successor would do.

b) Two people can work at the same job, but

(1) one is miserable and

(2) the other is happy.

(a) What is the difference?

i) One views life with the eyes of the flesh,

ii) the other views life with the eyes of the Spirit.

(b) How do you view life?

III. A Journey of the Mind

- A. We journey with Solomon but
 - 1. not on earth.
 - 2. The journey deals with the things of the earth, but
 - a) the journey happens in the mind.
 - b) Where do our minds go on our daily journeys?
- B. Solomon searched for something intensely and
 - 1. we listen and
 - 2. watch with him:

2.13

**Then I saw that wisdom excels folly
As light excels darkness.**

2.24

**Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that
his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the
hand of God.**

3.16

**Moreover I saw under the sun:
In the place of judgment,
Wickedness was there;
And in the place of righteousness,
Iniquity was there.**

4.4

**Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by
his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

4.7

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun...

4.15

**I saw all the living who walk under the sun;
They were with the second youth who stands in his place.**

8.10

Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place

of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity.

8.17

Then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

3. Start reading the Book of Ecclesiastes this week,
 - a) go with Solomon on his journey, and
 - b) I will preach through this marvelous Book.

Exhortation:

I. America, in my judgment,

- A. needs the understanding of Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes,
 1. more than any other biblical Book, because
 2. Solomon went on a journey
 - a) of living by purely worldly values and pleasures,
 - b) just what the majority of Americans do today—
 - (1) and even many Christians do—but
 - (2) Solomon shows that if you leave out the main ingredient,
 - (a) your life will be futile.
 - (b) Read the Book to find the missing ingredient,
 - i) which he reveals several times along the way.
 - ii) If you catch his understanding,
 - (1) it will change your life forever.
 - (2) It will better your life forever.
 - B. You may have everything that you believe brings happiness and fulfillment.
 1. However, Psalm 49 explains

2. that all those things mean nothing
3. in the day of one's death:

**6 Those who trust in their wealth
And boast in the multitude of their riches,
7 None of them can by any means redeem his brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him—
8 For the redemption of their souls is costly,
And it shall cease forever—
9 That he should continue to live eternally,
And not see the Pit.
10 For he sees wise men die;
Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish,
And leave their wealth to others.**

– Psalm 49.6–10

- a) Think and apply what the psalmist said.
- b) What drives you everyday?
 - (1) Is it gaining wealth, which is what he addressed?
 - (2) Is it politics?
 - (3) A project?
 - (4) You name it.
 - (a) What will it matter when it is time to die?
 - (b) We should not wait until death knocks on our door
 - i) before we start deciding what matters.
 - ii) Make that decision now.

II. Remember

- A. that Jobe had everything, but
 1. he lost it all and
 2. still remained faithful to the Lord,
- B. Solomon had everything, and

1. kept it all, but
 2. temporarily lost his faith in the Lord.
- C. The Lord is what should matter in our lives.
1. No other concern surpasses the Lord being number one in our lives.
 2. Make anything or anyone number one and you will see the vanity of life
 - a) when you are ready to die, because
 - b) as the psalmist declared
 - (1) our wealth and for that matter,
 - (2) nothing else,
 - (a) can redeem us from the Pit.
 - (b) Only our Creator can perform such a task.

III. Now, listen to what he said.

- A. See your Creator as the ultimate meaning of life:

10 “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

– John 10.10

- B. Those were the words of Jesus of Nazareth
1. who was God in the flesh,
 2. demonstrated by
 - a) his miraculous works and
 - b) his wonderful words.

IV. The key to life, therefore,

- A. is to find life from him.
- B. Do you accept him as the Son of the living God?

V. Where are you on the journey of life?