

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 1

Ecclesiastes is a very relevant book for today. This past quarter, we examined it in our teen class. “Why Are We Here?” “What’s Life All About?” Ecclesiastes is a challenging and important book that deserves close examination.

Its relevance in the face of current events can actually serve as “common ground” and a starting point when sharing the gospel with someone you know.

Our present times and the seeming uncertainties they contain are addressed in this book.

The message of Ecclesiastes is that the course of life to be pursued is a God-centered life. People trying to be happy without God – this book shows the absurdity of that.

The pleasures of life are not intrinsically fulfilling and cannot offer lasting satisfaction, but they can be enjoyed as gifts from God.

Life offers good times and bad and follows no pattern, but all comes from the hand of God.

### **Some sayings – can you identify their source?**

Have you heard? ***Many of the sayings from Ecclesiastes are familiar to us.***

1. “To everything there is a season.” (Ecc 3:1)
2. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Lk 6:31)
3. “Two are better than one.” (Ecc 4:9)
4. “A time to kill and a time to heal.” (Ecc 3:3)
5. “Cleanliness is next to Godliness.” (Heb/Bab proverb)
6. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” (Ecc 9:10)
7. “To thine own self be true.” (Hamlet)
8. “There is nothing new under the sun. (Ecc 1:9)
9. “The Lord is My Shepherd.” (Ps 23:1)
10. “All men are created equal.” (Dec of Ind.)
11. Extra credit: “A little birdie told me” (var Ecc 10:20)

## Some Background

**Author:** doesn't give name, calls himself Qoheleth [ko-hell-it] –

- Hebrew word means preacher, teacher, gatherer.
- Ecclesiastes – think “ecclesia”: is Greek for “the assembly” We gather together.
- Ecclesiastes is Greek form of the Hebrew word Qoheleth.

It is preceded with a **definite article**, the...so probably not a name but rather a title.

But what is Qoheleth gathering?

Could be gathering people (preacher). But Ecclesiastes doesn't contain sermons.

Could be gathering observations and proverbs to share. (as a teacher)

Tradition holds this teacher is King Solomon, written in old age:

- “The Son of David, King in Jerusalem.” (Ecc 1:1,12)
- Unsurpassed wisdom (Ecc 1:16)
- Unparalleled works (2.5-7)
- Unequaled wealth (2.7-8)
- Unimaginable harem of women (2.8)

Arguments against:

- Speaks of reign in past tense (1:12), but was king until he died. (one could read the verse in a ‘present tense’)
- Mentions “all who were over Jerusalem” before him (1:16) but only 2 kings preceded him. (Saul, David) HOWEVER: may not only refer to Israelite rulers but to the non-Israelite rulers before David: Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), Adonizedic (Josh. 10:1), Araunah (2 Sam. 24:23)
- Teacher quits using the image of kingship in Ch 2 and is elsewhere critical of the king. (in his wisdom, he can see the faults of an earthly king)
- Hebrew used is generally considered to be from a later time period.

Since scripture is silent on the matter, we cannot be confident in identifying Qoheleth.

**Nonetheless:** 2 Timothy 3<sup>16</sup> All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:<sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

**In that light, the human authorship is not the point...** Author here refers to himself as Preacher or teacher, so that's how we'll refer to him.

Also, seems to be an editor involved in compiling the final text – Teacher is referred to in the third person. We'll discuss it later.

**Because we don't know the author,** we really don't know when Ecc was written. If by Solomon, maybe 930s BC. If someone else, maybe even after exile (based on development of Wisdom literature and style of Hebrew language it uses) so maybe as late as 540-300 BC)

**I'm reading from the ESV; Pew bibles page 553. Whatever translation you're using is fine.**

### **Ecc 1:1-3**

The words of the Preacher,<sup>[a]</sup> the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Vanity<sup>[b]</sup> of vanities, says the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

<sup>3</sup> What does man gain by all the toil  
at which he toils under the sun?

ESV, KJV: Preacher (Vanity of Vanities)

NIV, ICB: Teacher (Meaningless! Meaningless!) (Useless! Useless!)

NAB: Qoheleth (Vanity of Vanities)

GNT: Philosopher (Life is useless, all useless)

MSG: Quester (Smoke, nothing but smoke) *Relate Col 3 from MSG at baptism: Redlands*

**Purpose:** It's all about the search for the meaning and significance of life.

<sup>3</sup> What does man gain by all the toil  
at which he toils under the sun?

This question is posed in realization of 1:2 –

<sup>2</sup> Vanity<sup>[b]</sup> of vanities, says the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Everything is meaningless??? At first glance, there seems to be a depressing tone...

Before we dive in, let's consider an English word...

“case”

- An argument: “Make a case” for something.
- An Example: “This is a case of \_\_\_\_\_”
- A Container: pencil case, briefcase.
- A lawsuit/trial: “the OJ Simpson case.”
- An Instance of disease: a case of pneumonia
- A crazy person: “That guy is a nutcase!”
- Expression of Frustration: “Get off my case!”
- A form of letters: “Upper case and lower case letters”

There are a lot of ways that the word **case** can be used.

Case in point (lol):

לְבָהּ hebel [he-vel] (Strong's 1892)

- Is the word translated as ‘meaningless’ or ‘vanity’.
- Important theme in Ecclesiastes
- Used 38 times in Ecc, more than rest of OT combined.
- Literal meaning is “breath”
- When used as a metaphor, there are diff possibilities of how it should be translated.

**Discuss: What word does your translation use for vanity? When you hear the word vanity, what are some different ideas you associate with that word?**

לְבָהּ hebel [he-vel]

- Has a range of possible meanings
- Any of these can be legitimate depending on context

**Vanity:** Traditional understanding. Conveys sense of meaninglessness or emptiness. If everything is meaningless, then what are we doing here?

An illustration of that is found with Anna Spafford:

Ref: Horatio Spafford 1873 / Ville Du Havre / It is Well

This hymn was written after traumatic events in Spafford's life:

The first two were the death of his four-year-old son and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which ruined him financially (he had been a successful lawyer and had invested significantly in property in the area of Chicago that was extensively damaged by the great fire).[1]

His business interests were further hit by the economic downturn of 1873, at which time he had planned to travel to England with his family on the SS Ville du Havre, to help with D. L. Moody's upcoming evangelistic campaigns.

In a late change of plan, he sent the family ahead while he was delayed on business concerning zoning problems following the Great Chicago Fire.

While crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the ship sank rapidly after a collision with a sea vessel, the Loch Earn, and all four of Spafford's daughters died.[2]

His wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, "Saved alone ...".

Shortly afterwards, as Spafford traveled to meet his grieving wife, he was inspired to write these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had died.[3]

Bliss called his tune Ville du Havre, from the name of the stricken vessel.[4]

Anna Spafford said, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why."

Naturally, Anna was utterly devastated, but she testified that in her grief and despair, she had been conscious of a soft voice speaking to her, "You were saved for a purpose!"

So all that speaks to the concept of “vanity”.

**Absurdity:** Ecclesiastes argues that there should be some meaning to life, but unfortunately there isn't. Life is absurd, and this is the problem the author is writing about. Life is unreasonable or irrational and undermines morality – no point in being good people.

**Mystery:** “breath” in the sense of hard to grasp. Inconsistent, unpredictable and mysterious it simply can't be understood. This is better than meaningless or absurd, but leaves us in a frustrating place. Life may have meaning, but we struggle to know what it is.

**Temporary:** fleeting, not lasting, quickly fades away. Not that life is empty or meaningless, (There are moments of great joy!) but just doesn't last.

So... first two are problematic since we'll see he recommends living in certain ways, which would make no sense if everything was meaningless.

But...some textual support for mysterious. Ecc 8:14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Ecc 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

And...we'll see textual evidence which supports interpretation as temporary:

Ecc 6:12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain[a] life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

Ecc 3:19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. “brief” could replace “vain” here.

Ecc 7:15 In my vain[a] life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. “brief” could replace “vain” here too.

***Handout: Hebel as temporary. (basis p26-27)***

Superlative:

- In English, add –est (biggest, friendliest, etc.)
- In Hebrew it’s idiomatic. Vanity of Vanities, Song of Songs, Holy of Holies. Of all the Holies, this is the holiest. Of the songs, this one is THE song.

This impacts how we interpret Ecclesiastes. It’s not that everything in life is sad, empty, meaningless.

There are places in this book that emphasize the joy that comes from appreciating God’s gifts and the good things in life.

But this life does not last and will pass away. And some things in life are beyond our understanding.

**Is 55:8-9** 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Read in context, **James 4:13-14**:

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a **mist** that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

**Abel**

This name comes from hebel. In the OT, names often reveal some part of a person’s character. Abraham – father of a multitude. Isaac – he laughs. In the

same way, “breath” or “brief” was a fitting name for Abel. He embodied the fact that life is temporary and in many ways, hard to understand – despite righteous living, he was killed by his brother in a fit of jealous rage.

Understanding *hebel*, then Chapter 1 is pretty straightforward.

**There is a literary device to note:**

**Inclusio** (in English, “Framing”)

The Frame helps us interpret everything inside the frame.

- **Read Ecc 1:2**
- <sup>2</sup> Vanity<sup>[b]</sup> of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
- **Read Ecc 12:8**
- <sup>8</sup> Vanity<sup>[a]</sup> of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

**Think of it as ‘bookends’: everything in between belongs together.**

**Ecc 1:3 –** What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? What’s the point? What is the gain or benefit of the work we do? (**Here the teacher begins to answer his own question – a process which he will do for the rest of the book.**)

Jesus expands on that question in Mark 8:36-38, where he says,

36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Ecc. 1:4-11** <sup>4</sup> A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

<sup>5</sup> The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens<sup>[a]</sup> to the place where it rises.



<sup>6</sup>The wind blows to the south  
and goes around to the north;  
around and around goes the wind,  
and on its circuits the wind returns.

<sup>7</sup>All streams run to the sea,  
but the sea is not full;  
to the place where the streams flow,  
there they flow again.

<sup>8</sup>All things are full of weariness;  
a man cannot utter it;  
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
nor the ear filled with hearing.

<sup>9</sup>What has been is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done,  
and there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup>Is there a thing of which it is said,  
“See, this is new”?

It has been already  
in the ages before us.

<sup>11</sup>There is no remembrance of former things,<sup>[b]</sup>  
nor will there be any remembrance  
of later things<sup>[c]</sup> yet to be  
among those who come after.

The cycle of life.

Generations come and go, sun rises and sets, impermanence of life. Fleeting aspect of hebel.

Perhaps this silently demonstrates our need for an eternal life. A life beyond fleeting.

**Refocus on 1:9-10** <sup>9</sup> What has been is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done,  
and there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup> Is there a thing of which it is said,  
“See, this is new”?

It has been already in the ages before us.

Nothing new under the sun. May seem to be new because the past is easily forgotten. Also, “under the sun” is earthly; apart from God.

“Under the sun” – appears 29 times.

The 10 Commandments haven’t needed to change. Sin is still the same.

But God’s love is also still the same.

This passage does not mean our lives are unimportant – but it should cause us to question our motives.

“Making a name for myself” – will it last?

### **Ref. notes from teen class:**

\*\*Life can be hard for teenagers to understand; there is a common assumption that once they grow up they will be able to figure things out. As older adults, it is amazing how quickly time passes, and we never understand all the things we wish we did.

### **Read Ecc 1:12-15 [Slide 4] [Slide 5]**

<sup>12</sup> I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>14</sup> I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. <sup>15</sup> What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

**Ecc: 1:12** Recall Solomon, as “King over Israel”. Here, the teacher begins to speak in the first person.

[Slide 6] **1:13** “heart” The Hebrew term denotes the center of one's inner life, including mind, will, and emotions. (**Lēb** heart; by extension: the inner person, self, the seat of thought and emotion: conscience, courage, mind, understanding) **Cognitive and also emotive.**

**Also notable: author uses “Elohim” for God rather than “Yahweh”. Elohim focuses on sovereignty. God’s power and might.**

**1:14** “Vanity” as “mere breath” (hebel).

**1:15** [Slide 7] Contrast with Isaiah 40:3-4 KJV: <sup>3</sup> The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

[Slide 8][Slide 9] What is crooked cannot be made straight...by man. If you want to see that again tonight, peek ahead to Ecc 7:13. If not, we'll see it when we get there.

Human effort in and of itself is meaningless and hopeless – but when we are content with God's provision and direction, we have a different outlook.

**Read Ecc 1:16-18:** [Slide 10]

<sup>16</sup> I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” <sup>17</sup> And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. <sup>18</sup> For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Remember he is talking “under the sun”, so earthly – apart from God. Humanistic wisdom leads to grief and sorrow.

Human wisdom is good, but has its limitations (1:18)

So we see how he considers that human wisdom is meaningless.

**New Testament Bridge:** [Slide 11][Slide 12]

**Romans 8:18-23** <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to **futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[Slide 13] When the apostle Paul lamented the frustrations of life in a fallen world, he noted that the creation has been “subjected to frustration”(NIV), “subject to vanity” (KJV) (Romans 8:20).

Notably, the Greek word translated as “frustration” (mataiotes) is used 38 times in the Greek version of Ecclesiastes to render the word “meaningless,” leading some to speculate that Paul had Ecclesiastes in mind.

Either way, however, he identified the same problem highlighted by Solomon centuries earlier.

Thankfully, Paul revealed the solution: at Christ’s second coming, the world “will be liberated from its bondage to decay” and all believers in Jesus will receive perfect, eternal resurrection bodies (Romans 8:21–23).

On that day, the “meaningless” aspects of the present life will not be worth comparing to the glory of eternal life in heaven (Romans 8:18). **Source: *Storyline Bible***

In Ch. 2, the teacher will show that pleasure cannot give meaning or satisfaction.

## Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 2

Ch2: We have a desperate search for meaning in pleasures.

**Ask: What are some things people spend their time searching for?** (fame, fortune, popularity, possessions, accomplishments, relationships, etc.)

Recall from Ecc 1:9-10 There is nothing new under the sun.

**As we read through Ch 2, ask yourself, “Where is God in this?”**

**Read 2:1-11 (p553) [Slides 14-17]** <sup>1</sup> I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. <sup>2</sup> I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” <sup>3</sup> I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. <sup>4</sup> I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. <sup>5</sup> I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. <sup>6</sup> I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. <sup>7</sup> I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

<sup>9</sup> So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. <sup>10</sup> And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup> Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Verse 1 starts with “I thought in my heart.” That’s the same cognitive/emotive parallel we saw in Chapter 1. We’ll see it again in verse 15.

**Prov 14:13 (p537) [Slide 18]** Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.

Laughter is great, but a life built on laughter is a joke.

[Slide 19] 2:3 “My heart still guiding me with wisdom” The Preacher did not drink so much wine that he lost his ability to think clearly.

How to lay hold on folly. In Proverbs 9, we can see each one personified separately. They are effectively opposites. [Slide 20][Slide 21]

- 1 Wisdom has built her house;  
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- 2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;  
she has also set her table.
- 3 She has sent out her young women to call  
from the highest places in the town,
- 4a “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

- 13 The woman Folly is loud;  
she is seductive and knows nothing.
- 14 She sits at the door of her house;  
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
- 15 calling to those who pass by,  
who are going straight on their way,
- 16 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

This chapter shows two competing invitations, one from Wisdom, one from Folly.

Both are portrayed as women calling people to enter their houses.

Wisdom invites the simple to eat of her life-giving food (vv. 1–12).

Folly offers food that leads to death (vv. 13–18).

v.14 Folly counterfeits the actions of wisdom so as to appear wise (cf. v. 3).

2:4 In the tradition of great kings, he undertook great projects.

Verse 8: concubines / harem. This is the only place in the bible that this word is used.

[Slide 22] Verse 9: “So I became great” – fame; striven for then just as now.

In this section: laughter, wine, folly, works, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, fruit trees, pools, slaves, herds and flocks, silver and gold, singers, concubines, wives.

From an external viewpoint, seeing someone with those achievements might cause us to remark, “Wow – he is successful.” But is he?

He’s climbed the ladder of success, but it’s leaning on the wrong wall.

There is not an innate meaning in any of these things, some more important than others, but all are fleeting. They are not sinful in themselves.

Pleasure itself cannot give satisfaction or meaning.

All of these failed to bring lasting satisfaction to the teacher, **yet people nearly three thousand years later are still trying them in search of enduring fulfillment.** “There is nothing new under the sun.”

**Read Ecc 2:12-17 [Slides 23-24]** <sup>12</sup> So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. <sup>13</sup> Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. <sup>14</sup> The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. <sup>15</sup> Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. <sup>16</sup> For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! <sup>17</sup> So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

V12: ‘Comes after’ = succeeds

2:12-13 madness, folly. If he could not find life’s purpose in the highest forms of wisdom, he would consider the other extremes—folly and even insanity.

He sees the value of wisdom over folly; but there's a catch...<sup>16</sup> "For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!"

Trying to find meaning in these vanities are like chasing after the wind; trying to grab hold of smoke. Why bother??

If that's not enough, now he says he "hated life" (v17). And he feels the same about toil in the next section...

It's important to note he doesn't hate life – (observe that it is past tense), he is stating a temporary conclusion of his testing of wisdom and folly.

**Read Ecc 2:18-23 [Slides 25-26]** <sup>18</sup> I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, <sup>19</sup> and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. <sup>20</sup> So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, <sup>21</sup> because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. <sup>22</sup> What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? <sup>23</sup> For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

Part of the futility of trying to find fulfillment in material accomplishment is the fact that one must leave the fruit of his work to another.

A Jewish proverb says, "There are no pockets in shrouds."

**[Slide 27]** This thought is reflected also in Psalm 49:10 (p473), For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.

Whether that person is wise or foolish could impact how lasting your accomplishment is. That person becomes the master of your previous accomplishments.



[Slide 28] Ps 39:6 (p468) Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

Will your legacy live on through your accomplishments?

The teacher recognizes that death brings both foolishness and wisdom to an end, and that death made everything in life insignificant.

**Explanation comes in 2:24-26.**

[Slide 29] Read Ecc 2:24-26 <sup>24</sup> There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, <sup>25</sup> for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? <sup>26</sup> For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Enjoy what God has given us. That's why he gave it to us. Accept them with gratitude. But they are not the end in themselves.

'enjoyment' in v. 24 literally, "and make his soul see good".

Verse 24 acknowledges God as our Provider and Sustainer. This is the first of many "carpe diem" passages.

"From the hand of God"...God provides the food and drink, provides the toil (and our ability to perform it).

It's important to note that the teacher is not advocating 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,' but rather "Thank God for what you have, and enjoy it to the glory of God.

[Slide 30] **Discuss: How does this square up with 1 John 2:15?** (p1021) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[Slide 31] I am confident that the teacher would have completely agreed with what John stated next: <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and

the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Enjoyment in our toil is possible. “**find** enjoyment”: we might have to look for it; or we might have a job/career we really like.

Workaholic: a difference between conscientious and obsessed. As a workaholic, would we find enjoyment in our toil? Is there a point in it - given the brevity of any fame, recognition or benefit? We need to have a balance.

[Slide 32] Lk 12:20 (p871) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

There is nothing wrong with enjoying what God has provided. The true meaning of life, though, is not in what is provided, but in God himself.

[Slide 33] Col 3:17 (p984) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

**God’s sovereignty can bring comfort and meaning to our lives.**

**Ps 112:6** (p 509) For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 3

Ch1: We started with the Hebrew word “hebel” as it relates to vanity of vanities. We discussed “breath” as something fleeting.

Ch 2: We looked at self-indulgence, wisdom and toil; Ecclesiastes reminds us to enjoy what God has given us, they are not an end in themselves.

Chapter 3 emphasizes “seasons” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi0Lbjs5ECI>

A reflection on the upcoming passage; These are polar opposites in a multiple of seven (which suggests the idea of completeness), and the teacher began his list with birth and death. So, a merism suggesting totality.

Side note: "It may very well be that the Bible, as organized, functions as a merism, beginning in Genesis with Eden lost and ending in Revelation with the 'New Jerusalem' gained, these two referring to the entirety of human history and representing the 'Alpha and Omega' (Rev. 21.6) of God's sovereignty. Revelation 11:17 extends merism to the triadic 'one who is, was, and is coming.' Finally, while it may be to stretch a point, it might be said that the 'Old Testament' and the 'New Testament' form a merism that represent all of God's word and the 'Bible' as totality." (Jeanie C. Crain, Reading the Bible as Literature: An Introduction. Polity Press, 2010)

Seasons

**Read Ecc 3:1-8. (p554)**

[Slide 2-3]

<sup>1</sup>For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

<sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
<sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
<sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

[Slide 4] Trivia/Memory Lane: The Byrds – Turn! Turn! Turn! (1966)

[Slide 5] Blank

**Discuss: What is the point of this poem?**

\*God determines the broad order of human events and experiences. A “Tapestry of Times”. Does not infer we will necessarily be involved in all of these.

Consider also the construction of a tapestry. From the underside, the tapestry appears chaotic, disorganized. When viewed from the front, it is beautiful. The maker of the tapestry has a wise purpose for the placement of each thread.

There is a cycle to our lives; even things we perceive to be bad have a proper place in the cycle.

A person is born and grows up, we expect that person to die at some point. When someone dies while still young, it feels out of place.

It doesn't work to plant all the time. You have to plant at the right time of the year, replenish nutrients. When the harvest is ready, we reap.

We try to avoid sadness, nervous about attending funerals. Appropriate to mourn and weep. Weeping may be a part of life, but life is not *all* weeping.

There are times when we really need to keep our mouths shut, and there are other times when we need to speak out.

Think of Job's friends – they would have comforted him more if they had just kept their mouths shut. OTOH, if we see someone being bullied or made fun of, we speak up and stand for the oppressed.

Righteous anger is legitimate under the appropriate circumstances.

Most commentators see an allusion to the practice of marring an enemy's fields by casting stones upon them, as the Israelites did when they invaded Moab (2 Kings 3:19, 25).

A time for war. We probably can all agree war is not a fun time. The US entered WWII to curtail Adolph Hitler and the rise of Nazi Germany.

**Read Ecc 3:9-11 (p554)**

[Slide 6]

<sup>9</sup> What gain has the worker from his toil? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

3:11 is a keystone verse with two major points. First: He has made everything beautiful in its time.

**Discuss: Does what we considered in 3:1-8 seem beautiful?**

**Discuss: Why do you think God allows “bad” things like death and war to occur?**

**Discuss: What does it mean for everything to be beautiful in its time?**

*Remember: Our perceptions are limited; Since the Garden of Eden, humans have been seeking to define good and bad on our own terms. God tells us what is good.*

The term “beautiful” is as is suitable for the occasion. Everything is fitting or appropriate for its time. Each season is to be considered as part of the whole.

Humans seem to have a tendency to “look ahead” and wish we were in a different season of life.

In his book, "Why Are We Here", Luke Dockery shared this anonymous poem:

[Slide 7]

### I Was Dying

**"First I was dying to finish high school and start college.  
And then I was dying to finish college and start working.  
And then I was dying to marry and have children.  
And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for  
school so I could return to work.  
And then I was dying to retire.  
And now, I am dying... and suddenly I realize I forgot to live."  
(Anonymous)**

"He has put eternity into man's heart" ... we possess an innate knowledge that there is something more to life than what we can see and experience in the here and now.

Since we were made for eternity, the things of time cannot fully and permanently satisfy.

God has given the Teacher a desire to understand all of life, but God has also limited his ability to do so.

God has "set eternity in the human heart." In every human soul is a God-given awareness that there is "something more" than this transient world. And with that awareness of eternity comes a hope that we can one day find a fulfillment not afforded by the "vanity" in this world.

When we think "eternity" we usually think eternity with God. God is eternal, and directs eternity, and only through his revelation can we have some understanding of it.

Left to ourselves, life is "hebel" – impenetrable and mysterious.

Carpe Diem...seize the day. Make the most of the time we have.

Make your lives extraordinary.

**Read: Ecc 3:12-13. (p554)**

[Slide 8]

<sup>12</sup> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Verse 13 is an echo of Ecclesiastes 2:24, where the same guidance is given.

Rather than becoming resentful about what God has not granted human beings, one should enjoy the gifts that God has given.

**Read: Ecc 3:14-15. (p554)**

[Slide 9]

<sup>14</sup> I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. <sup>15</sup> That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Use what we have, live in the here and now. To struggle for anything other than harmony with this reality is to act insanely and with the utmost futility.

Instead, the only rational response to reality is to “revere him [God]” (v. 14), issuing in a life centered on God. We will be hearing this again...

(This precise advice — to revere or fear God, acknowledging that he is Creator and that we are only creatures (5:2) — will be repeated forcefully in 5:7 and in the conclusion to the whole book in 12:13: “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.”)

Verse 15 is an echo of Ecc. 1:9, What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Verses 1-8 have an important connection with the theme of the book and relate closely to what precedes and to what follows.

The significance of this section is that man is responsible to discern the right times for the right actions; and when he does the right action according to God's time, the result is 'beautiful' (v. 11)."

[Slide 10] Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 serves as a bridge between the first two chapters and the section that follows. Each day is a gift from the hand of God (2:24–26). Why? Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 explains it is because God has a reason and a time for all things.

People do not know God's timing (3:9–11), but they are called to enjoy life in the present (3:12–13) and trust in God's sovereignty (3:14–15).

Man is to take his life day by day from the hand of God (2:24-26; 3:12-13), realizing that God has a fitting time for each thing to be done (v. 1).

[Slide 11] YOLO: You only live once

YOLO IS NOT – “You only live once, so let's do some crazy and reckless things”

YOLO is rather: “You only live once, so let's take advantage of the time God has given us and make the most of it. Make the most of the season you happen to be in; eat, drink and take pleasure in our work – these are gifts from God!”

Carpe Diem.

**Read Ecc 3:16-22. (p554)**

[Slides 12-14]

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. <sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, God **will** judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. <sup>18</sup> I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God **is testing** them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. <sup>19</sup> For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same



breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? <sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

This section talks about judgment and death. He sees wickedness and injustice, but he trusts that God is just and will bring judgment in its time.

In verse 17 we see the teacher saying that **God WILL** judge the righteous and the wicked. A future, divine event – for all.

[Slide 15]

We have the confirmation of that in Revelation 20:12 (p1041) - And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

The fall of mankind affects all human relationships. One may suffer wickedness at the hand of other human beings. But this can be endured if one understands that God will judge the righteous and the wicked. The teacher will have more to say regarding oppression as we move into Chapter 4.

In verse 18, we see God (in the present tense) is testing the children of man “that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.” Man has no advantage over beasts in avoiding physical death.

[Slide 16] (Asaph) Ps. 73: 21-24 (p486) <sup>21</sup>When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, <sup>22</sup> I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. <sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. <sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

Regarding death, once breath leaves our bodies, we're dead. There is a season for it.

[Slide 17] Ecc 3:20-21: <sup>20</sup> All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

Here, the teacher refers to physical death – In v17, he has already stated that the righteous and the wicked will be judged, so for humans physical death is not the absolute end.

The concept of faith hasn't been explicitly stated in Ecclesiastes, but the teacher seems to be calling on us to operate on faith.

God has placed man "under the sun", but with eternity in his heart, humankind should recognize a "beyond the sun" aspect. So from that, we infer that man is prescribed to operate "under the sun" with a "beyond the sun" perspective.

Verse 21 does not imply ignorance, it seems to be a cynical look at the matter. How to handle this verse is interpreted many ways by many scholars.

We can look at two other verses in Ecclesiastes with the similar phrase, Ecc 2:19 & 6:12

[Slide 18]

3:21 **Who knows** whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

2:19 and **who knows** whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

6:12 For **who knows** what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain[a] life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

We read in Proverbs 15:24 (p539), **The path of life leads upward for the prudent, that he may turn away from Sheol beneath.**

[Slide 19]

Remember Fiddler on the Roof?

Hodel: Papa, God alone knows when we shall see each other again.

Tevye: Then we will leave it in His hands.

There are many things which God alone knows. We can leave those in His hands.

Life is fleeting and hard to comprehend. Fits with our definition of “*hebel*”.

This chapter closes with some guidance from the teacher:

[Slide 20]

<sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

As an end in itself, work is meaningless.

[Slide 21]

<sup>12</sup> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Only receiving it as a gift from God gives it enduring worth.

Ecclesiastes gives us the perspective of enjoying and making the most of the season we are in.

## Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 4

Chapter 4 points at some things which can keep us from joy:

- Oppression (4:1-3)
- Envy (4:4-6)
- Loneliness (4:7-12)
- Fleeting nature of power (4:13-16)

The chapter division here can obscure that content in chapters 3 & 4 are connected.

Recall that the teacher believed God would eventually balance the scales of justice (3:17), and that he uses injustice for His purposes.

**Read Ecc 4:1-3 [Slide 2] (p555)**

<sup>1</sup>Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

#### ***Oppression (vv1-3)***

This section starts with an interesting word, “again”. As he returns to this meditation, he notices not only the oppression, but its effects.

Teacher makes some observations about harshness of life, specifically oppression in v1-3. In the ancient world, there was no middle class. A few rich, and a lot of extremely poor people, working long hours with little return. Poor had very little legal protection to prevent them from being taken advantage of. Major theme of OT prophets is God’s displeasure with the wealthy for taking advantage of the poor. Teacher doesn’t see much hope.

Verse 2 has some strong language! In the face of oppression, the teacher says those who are already dead are more fortunate. And more fortunate still is the one who has not yet been born to see the oppression.

The poor are powerless to do anything about their condition.

The feeling of despair is similar to what we see in Job, or in Jeremiah at the end of chapter 20.

**Discuss: Is injustice and oppression still something that happens today?**

**What should our response be when we witness these things?**

Apart from influence of God, people will often choose to victimize one another. As Christians, we should be very deliberate about confronting evil and oppression that goes on “under the sun”.

[Slide 3] We've had some direction on this in the past: Ecc 2:26 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. AND 3:22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

[Slide 4] *By thoroughly disgusting us with the world, and by making us realize its absolute vanity, **God** means to draw us to himself. Only in this way can **Yahweh**, the true and absolute Being, become to us what he really is. Through much tribulation must our hold on earthly things be loosened and ourselves enter into the kingdom of God. (Ernst Hengstenberg, 1860)*

The teacher does not use YHWH in Ecclesiastes. With a subject of common application to *all mankind*, the use of God's name YHWH in his special covenant role with Israel, is inappropriate.

This illustration is especially beautiful because while Ecclesiastes stresses the “Elohim” – the God , it helps demonstrate our need for a Lord, “Yahweh” (and later Christ).

But Elohim and Yahweh are intrinsically one; the Shema affirms that:

[Slide 5] Dt 6:4-6 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (p151)

### ***Envy (vv4-6)***

[Slide 6] Of the 9 occurrences of “striving after wind” in Ecclesiastes, 3 are in this chapter.

### **Read Ecc 4:4-6 [Slide 7]**

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. <sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. <sup>6</sup> Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

### ***Envy (vv4-6)***

How often is our hard work and achievement based on the fact that we envy what other people have and want to outdo them?

Do we work hard because we care about our jobs or so we can have a better title or buy a nicer car than our neighbors?

Concept of: Keeping up with the Joneses; The grass is always greener on the other side.

If oppression damages relationships (1–3), so more subtly does envy (4–6). Much effort is motivated by the desire to outclass others.

Contrast this with the life of Joseph.

\*\*Recall Teen class discussion of snacks.

What does 4:5 mean?? (v5 is opposite of v4 – laziness)

[Slide 8] A similar concept is found in Pr. 6:10-11, A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,<sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man. (p531)

[Slide 9] Also a similar concept in Isaiah 9:20: They slice meat on the right, but are still hungry, and they devour on the left, but are not satisfied; each devours the flesh of his own arm, (p574)

Legend/Parable: The Blood knife. *I originally heard this from our preacher Harry Gipson in Del Rio around 1991.* The one thing a wolf is attracted to more than anything else is blood. Once a wolf smells blood, it becomes bloodthirsty. Their appetite for blood is insatiable. By using their weakness against them, Alaskan hunters came up with a simple trap and hunted the wolves.

The Alaskan hunters would dip the end of a knife in blood and then freeze it. They would then add a second and third layer, creating, for lack of a better word, a blood popsicle. They would then take the blood knife and bind it to something solid.

Smelling the scent of blood from many miles away, the wolf would come to the knife with a strong sense of hunger. Initially, there is much joy and delight. The wolf becomes consumed with the blade, licking it repeatedly until it eventually slices their tongue to shreds. Unable to distinguish their blood from the blood on the blade, they will continue to lick the blade, thinking they were enjoying an incredible meal. As blood spatters on the surrounding snow, the wolf has no idea they are lacerating their own mouth, causing a slow bleeding death. The same can be said for those being seduced by worldly pleasures and those with a “crafty heart.” (current source: [tribune.org/the-blood-knife](http://tribune.org/the-blood-knife))

#### Review Slide for Verse 6: [Slide 10]

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. <sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. <sup>6</sup> Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Contentment (6) is better than rivalry (4) or laziness (5). A middle of the road attitude between the two extremes.

Neither hard work nor idleness brings happiness, meaning or fulfillment.

[Slide 11] We'll give Paul the last word here, Phil 4:11-13. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (p982)

Read Ecc 4:7-12 [Slides 12-13]

<sup>7</sup> Again, I saw vanity under the sun: <sup>8</sup> one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

### ***Loneliness (vv7-12)***

As we look at v 7-12 we see the meaninglessness of being alone, and the importance of companionship. It's good to have people in your life whom you care about and with whom you can share the fruits of your labors.

Some people engage in endless toil yet are never satisfied even though they acquire great riches.

Ecc 2 we talked about workaholic; but we hopefully work hard to provide for people we care about.

[Slides 14-15] There is a Swedish proverb: "Shared joy is a double joy, shared sorrow is half a sorrow."

When we are going through difficulty, being around our friends can help bring us comfort.



Pits (10), cold nights (11) and bandits (12a) faced the ancient traveler, suggesting the need of companionship in times of accident (10), inadequacy (11) and adversity (12a).

The increase of number from two (9, 12a) to three is significant: the more friends the better.

A threefold cord stands for the great value of being part of a larger group rather than being alone.

**Read Ecc 4:13-16 [Slide 16]**

<sup>13</sup> Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. <sup>14</sup> For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. <sup>15</sup> I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. <sup>16</sup> There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

### ***Fleeting Nature of Power (vv13-16)***

Negative words regarding the king. (remember authorship question)

The tone in this section sounds like hindsight.

Being a king isn't so great if you are a foolish king.

Also you can be poor and wise.

No matter what he does, his reign is "hebel" – fleeting. Those after him will forget about him. In the teen class we compared this to the US presidents. Even if we could name them, do we know the significant contributions of each?

13-14 Don't ever get too self-important to learn. We all know people who've reached the top and yet are fools.

Who is absent from this passage? God. Without God, position and prestige are meaningless.

[Slide 17] Hidden in the tapestry of this chapter, and discussed in our teen class:

- Combine our abilities and work together.
- Be a companion.
- Be a voice in your school or workplace.
- Show your character.
- Exercise wisdom. Recall the seasons and know where you are. (time to speak, time to be silent, etc.)

## Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 5

Questions:

1. What is one of your favorite gifts that you ever received? What is it about this gift that makes it your favorite? [Slide 2]
2. What are some examples of different kinds of gifts that God gives to people? [Slide 3]
3. What are some specific gifts that God has given to you? [Slide 4]

When we realize what we have comes from God (All of it) this radically changes our perspective on life.

Slight change in direction...So far, the teacher has made many observations about life, and some about human relationships, but hasn't spent much time speaking directly about our relationship with God. That changes here in the first section of Ecc 5. (p555)

**Read Ecc 5:1-7 [Slide 5] [Slide 6]**

<sup>1</sup> Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. <sup>2</sup> Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

<sup>4</sup> When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

The NIV translates the latter part of v7 as: **Therefore stand in awe of God.**

[Slide 8] 1 Samuel 15:22 has the same distinction between real and superficial worship.

And Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams. (p238)

“House of God” – what is mentioned here? Do we have a house of God today?

***Distinguish: Temple, church buildings, our bodies.***

Here, the teacher talks about being careful and reverent in how we approach God. OT Prophets theme is to say how it frustrates God when people come to worship him and go through motions of devotion, but then their daily life doesn't match that devotion.

Does the person we look like on Sunday resemble the person we look like on other days of the week?

Teacher also warns us to be careful of our words. Knowing when to speak and when to be silent. (Recall Ecc 3:7)

“God is in heaven and you are on earth.” What is the point in saying this? We do well when we acknowledge our ‘place’ in the creation.

Not saying God is distant so we cannot know or understand him. God WANTS us to know him. [Slide 9] John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son[a] from the Father, full of grace and truth. (p886)

Recognize God is distinct from us. He is sovereign, sits on throne of universe. We do not control him by our worship.

Ecc 5:4-5 shows how we need to be wise in making vows to God. If you promise something, do it.

The original audience of the teacher would have recognized that from the law:

[Slide 10] Dt. 23:21-23 <sup>21</sup> “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. <sup>22</sup> But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. <sup>23</sup> You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth. (p165)

“I’ll pray for you” ...follow through.

**Read (p212) Judges 11:34-40.** Jephthah made a vow before going into battle.

[Slide 11] [Slide 12] <sup>34</sup> Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. <sup>35</sup> And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.” <sup>36</sup> And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” <sup>37</sup> So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” <sup>38</sup> So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. <sup>39</sup> And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel <sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Discuss: What does it mean to fear God? (See 5:7)

Does not mean to live in terror of God. Not looking to see us so he can zap us. God does see all things, but he is not the “Cosmic Creeper”.

Fearing God has to do with being an upright and honest person. We “fear God” by respecting his ethical and moral demands for our lives.

[Slide 13] [Slide 14] [Slide 15] Read Ecc 5:8-17

<sup>8</sup> If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. <sup>9</sup> But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

<sup>10</sup> He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. <sup>11</sup> When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? <sup>12</sup> Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

<sup>13</sup> There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, <sup>14</sup> and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. <sup>15</sup> As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. <sup>16</sup> This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? <sup>17</sup> Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

This section echoes Ecc 4's handling of economic injustice and oppression. But it seems to go higher; a dishonest bureaucracy a network of corruption.

[Slide 16] In Ps 12:5 we see how God feels about oppression: "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs." (p452)

5:9 stands out in righteousness: **But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.** A leader who will take responsibility for the economic well being of his people and will seek justice. Such is a great benefit to society. Also serves as an example of stewardship.

Vs. 17 paints a picture of the character of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Money is a focus in this section. Bible speaks a lot about money. As we've seen, the Teacher was wealthy, so he knew all about what money could buy. Still, he said it was "hebel".

**[Slide 17] Read (p993) 1 Tim 6:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

**[Slide 18] Discuss: What problems can money bring that are mentioned in this section?**

- Addiction / dissatisfaction 5:10
- Attracts the greedy 5:11
- Becomes a status symbol/trophy 5:11
- Promotes worry 5:12
- Causes lack of sleep 5:12
- Leads to hoarding / stockpiling 5:13
- It is easily lost 5:14
- Cannot follow us after death 5:15-17

**[Slide 19] [Slide 20] [Slide 21] Read (p824) Mt 19:16-26**

<sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." <sup>18</sup> He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, <sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." <sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

<sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying,

“Who then can be saved?”<sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

### **Discuss: Is money inherently bad?**

Not inherently, but scripture has a lot to say about wealth that should make us careful in how we view it.

All our material possessions are “on loan” from God, for our use and stewardship. Remembering that can help us not get too attached to it and to look for ways to use it to help others and glorify God.

### **[Slide 22] Read Ecc 5:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. <sup>19</sup> Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. <sup>20</sup> For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

*Summary statement emphasizing importance of enjoying the blessings that God has given us. Carpe Diem is hidden in there.*

**[Slide 23]** A similar admonition is given to us in Heb 13:5 **Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** (p1009)

Work is good. God placed Adam in the garden to tend it. From the beginning, humans were intended to be workers.

The teacher is clear that much about life is “hebel” and hard to figure out.

Work, food and family are blessings God bestows on us to enjoy. If we think of these things as gifts rather than achievements, it helps focus our perspective.

There is a lot of joy to be found in living a simple life: constructive work, sufficient food, and fellowship.



We close this chapter with a focus on the last two verses of Ecc. 5:

[Slide 24] 19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

The “he” refers to the one who accepts his lot and rejoices in his toil.

## Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 6

#### **Contentment**

We've looked at seasons that make up the tapestry of our lives in Ch 3.

We've looked at some barriers to joy like oppression, envy, loneliness in Ch. 4.

We've talked about gifts and blessings in Ch. 5

Ecc 5 ended with the teacher talking about recognizing our blessings from God. In Ecc 6, the opposite is discussed. When we are unable to enjoy the blessings we have been given or when we're never satisfied with what we have.

In Ch. 6 we'll focus on contentment. In a way, we touched on this as we discussed accepting the season we are in.

**[Slide 2] Read Ecc. 6:1-2** <sup>1</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: <sup>2</sup> a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. (p556)

Not everyone can enjoy life for one reason or another, even though one may be wealthy (6:1-2). This problem "weighs heavily on men.."

Recall how in the last few verses of ch 5 the teacher tells us to "to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God."

Perhaps we can relate – we set a goal we want to achieve; we fall short. Can we be content? (In the teen class we looked at the story of McKayla Maroney the 2012 Olympic gymnast who took home a silver medal after falling on her second trial on the vault; she was expected to score high enough for the gold, and probably would have had she not fallen.)

The ability to enjoy God's blessings is a gift from God, not a right or guarantee. Recall the parable of the rich fool in Lk 12:13-20 - <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You

fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

The teacher ends v2 with the term "a grievous evil", the same language used in Ecc 5:13, I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:

**[Slide 3] Read Ecc 6:3-6. Discuss.**

<sup>3</sup> If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. <sup>4</sup> For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. <sup>5</sup> Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. <sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

"For the secularist, life is a pointless journey to extinction, to which being stillborn is the quickest and easiest route." Recall how Job lamented his birth in Job 3, actually cursing the day of his birth.

Verse 5, "has not seen the sun" in contrast to all that is seen "under the sun".

Verse 6 is an echo of 2:14, "the same fate overtakes them both". He's talking about physical death.

More than double Methuselah's age, it's an ironic exaggeration intended to show "no matter how long". 'Do not all go to the same place?' shows it has nothing to do with longevity.

**[Slide 4]** Recall in 3:17, "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work." There would be no purpose for judgement if there was no life beyond physical death.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 6:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. <sup>8</sup> For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? <sup>9</sup> Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

[Slide 6] Bread alone does not satisfy. John 6:27: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” (p891)

For his mouth – both directly and indirectly. Includes earning a living.

[Slide 7] Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on that which is not bread, and your labor on that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of foods. (p615)

Verse 8 is an interesting one – are these rhetorical questions? Or is the second question an answer to the first? The teacher seems to be asking 2 questions:

- Does the wise man have an advantage in this life?
- Does the poor man have an advantage if he knows how to handle himself? (conducting oneself before someone is to live as so to please him.)

[Slide 8] We see that concept in 1Ki 2:4: that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’ (p280)

Eyes that see and recognize the blessings of God are better than a wandering appetite that can’t be satisfied.

[Slide 9] In 1:8, the teacher said that “the eye is not satisfied with seeing,”

In 11:9, the teacher admonishes us to “walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”

[Slide 10] Rewards of life are:

- V7 - short-lived
- V8 - debatable
- V9 – elusive

[Slide 11] Jesus’ words in John 6:26, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” (p 891) In Jesus’ day, people were still seeking to satisfy their physical hunger. There is nothing new under the sun.

In 6:9 we see the last of the 9 times where the teacher uses the phrase “striving after wind. (1:14, 1:17, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:6, 4:16, 6:9)

If you’re using the outline, this ends the section on the futility of work which started in 1:12

**[Slide 12] Read 6:10-12.**

<sup>10</sup> Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. <sup>11</sup> The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? <sup>12</sup> For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

When things happen, the event gets a name. Recall 1:9: What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

In the ancient world, people recognized that the person who named something or someone was sovereign over it. God decrees the nature and name of all he creates.

This verse serves as a reminder of the limited control we have over our lives. We cannot dispute God.

We tell our kids, “You can accomplish anything you want to.” But that’s simply not true. Still, we can help them determine their gifts and abilities and encourage them.

We can combine our gifts and talents with hard work and achieve much, but there are limits. Not every child can grow up to be a professional football player. Some don’t get to grow up at all – cancer, a car accident, a tragedy that prevents them from even trying to accomplish their goals.

In the grand scheme, we have little control in what we can change, so we should find contentment in the blessings God has given us.

We do not know what’s best for us because we do not know the plans of God.

No amount of words can change these things, they may even add to the futility.

In 6:12, we see the double meaning of “hebel” life is fleeting (few days, shadow) and hard to understand. “who knows?”

[Slide 13] The teacher uses these “Who knows?” questions in several places:

2:19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

3:21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

6:12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

Expositors debate on whether they are rhetorical.

[Slide 14] What is good for man...?

- Something adequate for every day (the few days of his vain life)
- And which can cope with the futility of the earthly realm (while he lives on this earth)
- And the brevity of man (which he passes as a shadow)

Who knows? God

Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? Again, God.

The teacher is slamming every door except the door of faith.

[Slide 15] **Discuss: What are some reasons that people are not able to enjoy their blessings or are not satisfied with what they have?** We worry about what will happen when we’re gone, addictive behavior – wanting more, searching for meaning in our possessions, envying others, misunderstanding contentment.

Contentment is more about an attitude of thankfulness (gratitude) toward what you have.

[Slide 16] **Read Phil 4:10-13 (p982)**

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not

that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul says he has learned to be content in whatever situation he finds himself.

Contentment is an internal quality rather than an external one.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Jesus Christ empowers him to find contentment in all situations.

**[Slide 17] Discuss: Why is contentment so difficult for us? What can we do to be more at peace with our lives and to truly be content?**

Understand that our blessings are a gift from God, recognize there are different seasons in life, and it's not our job to try to measure up to the standards of the world.

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 7

### God Is In Control

***God's perspective is different from ours; even when life seems chaotic and out of control, God is still sovereign.***

God doesn't cause all things, but he is in control of all things.

He has an infinite knowledge of the past, present and future, which gives him a much better perspective on the world than we have.

When we look at the "word" of history rather than the letters, we know he is sovereign.

Remember, proverbs are not "absolute statements", but rather "general truths."

Remember also the seasons in Ch.3.

Teacher outlines several things as "good" or "better". In light of 6:12 [Slide 2]:

***<sup>12</sup> For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?***

\*\*This is a challenging chapter

[Slide 3] Read Ecc 7: 1-2

<sup>1</sup> A good name is better than precious ointment,

and the day of death than the day of birth.

<sup>2</sup> It is better to go to the house of mourning

than to go to the house of feasting,

for this is the end of all mankind,

and the living will lay it to heart.



We've seen this a few times: The teacher seems to throw up his hands in despair at the elements that are uncertain or incomprehensible, yet will urge wise and responsible behavior.

(Because God is sovereign and judges human behavior.)

These proverbs focus to a degree on death, it looks like he is obsessed with it. But look how he opens the chapter: The value of a good name.

A good name signifies a good character.

How do we earn a good name? Not by never living or by dying immediately. But through the good works we do – it is at the end of one's life when one's reputation is established and can be evaluated as a whole. So, for a man with a good name his name is better after living.

*Precious ointment* represents what is costly and fragrant. The thought is that the most expensive perfume can never take the place of an honorable life.

V2: When we come face to face with death, we are brought up short. We recognize that one day it will be our time. The living will lay it to heart.

He is saying not to fear it or to fight it, but to face it.

The house of feasting is an earthly pleasure, which the teacher already showed to be 'hebel' in chapter 2.

**[Slide 4] Read Ecc 7: 3-4**

<sup>3</sup> Sorrow is better than laughter,

for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

<sup>4</sup> The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

In the presence of death, a wise person maintains calmness even though have sorrow for the one who has died.

Wise <-> Fools : The teacher has already told us about the "gift of God" (5:19). It follows that the wise would have that and the fools would not.

Recall that “heart” refers to emotion and thought.

The mind is sharpened when we have to grapple with the great issues of life.

Oftentimes, some of the wisest people are those who have experienced deep suffering.

In my life, it seems my character has grown the most at the times when circumstances have been most difficult.

Often, wisdom is developed through the crucible of hard times.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 7: 5-6**

<sup>5</sup> It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise  
than to hear the song of fools.

<sup>6</sup> For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,  
so is the laughter of the fools;  
this also is vanity.

‘better’ - Constructive criticism instructs, corrects, and warns. The empty mirth of fools accomplishes nothing of lasting value.

The song of fools in 7.6 is an interesting metaphor: crackling of thorns under a pot. Dry thorns were used to start a fire because they provided quick combustion. They don’t give off much heat, but they cause a lot of noise.

Fools are the same way – they make a lot of noise but don’t provide much substance.

**[Slide 6] Read Ecc 7: 7**

Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,  
and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Both adversity and prosperity tempt people to abandon a wise lifestyle for one of folly.

The wise man’s prosperity might tempt him to accept a bribe, or his adversity might tempt him to oppress others.

**[Slide 7] Read Ecc 7: 8**

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,

and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

It is at the end when you can evaluate it as a whole.

Some of the best advice we get in life will be advice we don't want to hear. Maybe it's a rebuke, or someone trying to redirect your energies.

**[Slide 8] Read Ecc 7:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,

for anger lodges in the heart[b] of fools.

<sup>10</sup> Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

7:9 - Ever meet anyone with a short fuse? They blow up at the least provocation – and look foolish.

7:10 – “The good old days” as if things were so much better in the past. Remember that nothing is new under the sun.

**[Slide 9] Read Ecc 7:11**

Wisdom is good with an inheritance,

an advantage to those who see the sun.

Solomon's thought with regard to wisdom and an inheritance may be understood in several ways.

First, wisdom is good with an inheritance (NKJV; NASB); it enables the recipient to administer his bequest carefully.

Second, wisdom is good as an inheritance (JND); if one could choose only one heritage, wisdom would be a good choice.

Third, wisdom is as good as an inheritance; it is a source of wealth.

**[Slide 10] Read Ecc 7:12**

For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,

and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

A similar thought is found in **[Slide 11]** Pr. 3:16:

<sup>13</sup> Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, <sup>14</sup> for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. <sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. <sup>16</sup> Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

**[Slide 12] Read Ecc 7:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

<sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

The teacher presents us with another “Who” question.

Recall studying of 1:15, What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

God is ultimately in control. There will be different seasons, as we saw in Ch. 3.

**[Slide 13] Read Ecc 7:15-18**

<sup>15</sup> In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

<sup>16</sup> Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? <sup>17</sup> Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? <sup>18</sup> It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

NB: Even scholars disagree about what the Teacher is saying here!

One interpretation: We shouldn't be too good or too bad. (Does not fit with rest of scripture, and that would point to being lukewarm.)

Another interpretation: Some interpret righteous as “self-righteous” – we shouldn’t think too highly of ourselves.

A Third: The teacher is saying not to trust in our own goodness to get us through life without trouble – righteous living doesn’t guarantee worldly blessing.

Recall how “righteous” the Pharisees were.

Regardless, 7:18 makes it clear that fearing God is the proper response here.

One who fears God should avoid either extreme.

**[Slide 14] Read Ecc 7:19-22**

<sup>19</sup> Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

<sup>20</sup> Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

<sup>21</sup> Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. <sup>22</sup> Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Here are some additional proverbs. Earlier, the Teacher said wisdom was “hebel”; we see here that the Teacher doesn’t mean it is useless.

7:21 – People will criticize us; consider what they are saying, don’t always take it to heart. Realize too that sometimes we are critical of others.

7:19-22 Wisdom may be greater than the collective opinions of experienced leaders, and needed in the light of human sinfulness, which is seen especially in talk. One should not pay much attention to the vindictiveness of others. Our own thoughts and speech ought to make us realize its frequent inaccuracy.

**[Slide 15] Read Ecc 7:23-24**

<sup>23</sup> All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.

<sup>24</sup> That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

7:23-4 Wisdom is hard to find, elusive. “Who can find it out?”

**[Slide 16][Slide 17] Read Ecc 7:25-29**

<sup>25</sup> I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. <sup>26</sup> And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. <sup>27</sup> Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— <sup>28</sup> which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. <sup>29</sup> See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

7:26, heart is snares and nets – a seductive hunter. Hands that entrap. A wise one she cannot capture, only a sinner (foolish).

**[Slide 18]** Similar thoughts are found in Proverbs 2, with v 19: none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.

7:27 adding one thing to another (summing up). Scheme of things = explanation, reason, the account – depending on translation.

Man here = “adam” [mankind] (contrast with 7:5, “ish” [male]) woman = ‘ishshah’

**[Slide 19]**

God has created order and balance in life, but rather than heeding God’s design, humans have focused their attention in misguided ways.

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very** good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 8

### **The Value and Limits of Wisdom**

Human wisdom is valuable, but it has its limitations.

[Slide 2] Wisdom as a multi tool.

[Slide 3] Things to try to perform with a multi-tool:

- Comb your hair
- Hammer a nail
- Tie your shoe
- Play a song
- Cut a heart out of paper
- Hold a pencil and write with it
- Make a sleeveless T-shirt
- Pick a pin up off the floor
- Unscrew a screw
- Make a phone call
- Crack open a pecan
- Tell what time it is.

Multi tool is useful, but it can't do everything.

We will see in 8 that it starts by extolling the value of wisdom, and ends with an acknowledgement of its limitations.

[Slide 4] Read Ecc 8:1-5 (p557)

Who is like the wise?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,

and the hardness of his face is changed.

2 I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. 3 Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. 4 For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

### **Discuss: Are you a rule-follower or a rule-breaker?**

Turn signals, speed limits, exit doors at Walmart, etc.

Some rules more important than others; some people bristle at having to follow rules at all.

A wise person will know to obey the king (ruler), and also will generally know the best course of action as well as how to behave.

8:5 The wise person will find the proper time for each action (as we looked at in Chapter 3)

[Slide 5] Paul gives us a similar instruction in Romans 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (p 948)

### **[Slide 6] Read Ecc 8:6-9**

6 For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? 8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. 9 All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done **under the sun**, when man had power over man to his hurt.

8:6 Doing the necessary above and before addressing our own concerns.

8:7, Consider James 4:13-16 [Slide 7] (p1013)

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills,



we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Our knowledge of the future is lacking.

Human wisdom comes up short in helping us understand why God deals with people as He does.

[Slide 8] As we saw:

1:18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

7:13-14 Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

[Slide 9] Read Ecc 8:10-13

10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that **it will be well** with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Sometimes, ppl do evil things and get away with it – as a result it encourages them to keep doing evil things.

Also, because justice is not always apparent and often delayed, the unwise follow the path of evil.

Verses 12 & 13 show how God is in control and will take care of the righteous and punish the wicked.

His statement, “I know” shows a contrast to all the things he says he doesn’t understand.

**[Slide 10] Read Ecc 8:14**

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Then we see 14 which is injustice – and it is called vanity. The incomprehensible “Hebel” of life. (The rain falls on the just and the unjust.)

Job is a good example of this.

While we’re here: Retribution Theology / Deuteronomic Theology

Called so because it is described in some passages of Deut.: cf 11:26-28 and 30:11-20

**[Slide 11] Read Dt. 11:26-28 (p156)**

26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.

The thought in short is when we do good, God blesses us and when we do bad, He punishes us.

**Discuss: Is this a biblical idea we should believe?**

Think of the context – God speaking to the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land, God is telling them what they need to do if they expect him to support them in this task.

It is generally true, but it’s a problem if we make this an absolute rule.

- Job’s friends tried to get Job to confess sin he hadn’t committed.
- John 9, man born blind: who sinned for this man to be born blind? Him or his parents? Jesus says, “Neither.”

Consider the blind man – born that way so God can use him for this specific moment later.

We don't try to manipulate God into blessing us. As Christians, we love God, and we obey Him because we love him, come what may.

**[Slide 12] Read Ecc 8:15**

And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

By now, familiar advice. Eat and drink and be joyful. This is his fourth time making this statement. (2:24, 3:12-15, 5:18-20)

It stems from the Teacher's somber reflections about life: in the end, we can neither predict nor control prosperity or adversity.

We should submit to God, realizing He is in control, and enjoy those things with which he has blessed us.

**[Slide 13] Read Ecc 8:16-17**

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

The Teacher is obviously a wise man, and he recognizes the limitation.

In our limited wisdom, we simply cannot understand why certain things happen, or exactly how God is governing the world.

True wisdom includes the humility to admit that we cannot fully understand the work of God on this earth.

**[Slide 14] Dt. 29:29 says, (p 171)**

29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Example: the seven thunders of Rev. 10

The teacher's quest continues in the next chapter...

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 9

### Death is Coming

Ecclesiastes teaches that death is a certainty for us all, but *when* it will come for each of us is very uncertain. These two realities should influence the way we should live.

#### **[Slide 2]** *3 questions to consider*

- If you knew that you had exactly 50 years left in your life, what would you do?
- If you knew that you had exactly 10 years left in your life, what would you do?
- If you knew that you had exactly 30 days left in your life, what would you do?

Likely we'll see that with 50 years your plans might not change much. 50 years seems like a long time and roughly a lifespan. (We used 60 years here with the youth.) Even 50 years might put some of us well over 100!

10 years might mean a greater sense of urgency which might affect decisions about family or life in general.

With only 30 days, we would almost certainly make drastic decisions to make the most of the remaining time.

In view of the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of when it will occur, we should make the most of our lives.

#### **[Slide 3][Slide 4]** Read Ecc 9:1-6 (p 558)

<sup>1</sup> But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. <sup>2</sup> It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. <sup>3</sup> This is an evil in

all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

<sup>4</sup> But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup> For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. <sup>6</sup> Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

(9:1) As before, there are certain aspects of life that we cannot understand. We cannot predict either prosperity or adversity. God is in control. He sees the actions of the righteous and the wicked even when it seems like he doesn't.

(9:2) ceremonially clean/unclean

(9:3) Then he repeats an idea we've heard earlier in Ecc: no matter what we do in life, death awaits us all. Cf 2:12-17, 3:16-22

[Slide 5] Still, he argues, life is better than death. V4: But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Let's contrast this with what we read in Ch 4:2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

### **Discuss: So how to these two passages fit together?**

Remember that Ch. 4 was in the context of oppression. The severely oppressed may feel that death would be better than life, but here in 9 we see that when a person is dead, they are no longer have the opportunity to enjoy life. So it's not a contradiction, just a view from two different perspectives.

Let's look closely at v4: But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

That might seem 'normal' to us, but consider that in ancient Israel, dogs were a despised animal.

[Slide 6] 1 Sam 17:43 And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. (p240)

2 Sam 9:8 <sup>8</sup> And he paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" (p261)

**[Slide 7]** Mk 7:26-28 <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." (p 843)

By Roman times, dogs were allowed into the house, but in ancient Israel dogs were considered unclean; and scavengers.

So the basic idea here is that it is better to be alive in a lowly position than to be dead and honored.

(9:6) The dead have no capacity to enjoy life as the living can "under the sun".

So what should we do, knowing death is inevitable? Do we despair? Or sit and wait for it to happen? This next passage provides the answer to that question.

**[Slide 8]** Read Ecc 9:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. <sup>8</sup> Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. <sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

What had before been advice (2:24–26; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20) is now a call to action.

The basis of contentment is God's favor. Humankind has to receive contentment as God's gift (recall 3:13); it is in such a context that God will approve of the person's activity.

The Jews wore white garments on festive occasions, as emblems of joy and innocence. Be always pure, and always happy.

Recall in Mt 6:17 the direction to anoint the head with oil. Generally also used in joyous times.

The marriage referred to is affectionate, life-long, monogamous. “All the days of your vain life”.

What one’s hand finds refers to what is available and within one’s ability. Life is to be active, energetic, practical. Death is the end of opportunity.

These verses affirm that God does not simply *allow* humans to experience enjoyment, he **desires** them to experience it. Enjoy fully.

In all our actions, carpe diem.

**[Slide 9] Read Ecc 9:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. <sup>12</sup> For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

More verses that spell out the uncertainty of life. In context and as written, the intent is “the race is not *always* to the swift, nor the battle *always* to the strong...”

Shows the unpredictability of life. We do not see what will happen to us ahead of time; and not always able to do much about our circumstances as they develop.

The five accomplishments (race, battle, food, wealth, favor) listed in verse 11 are tempered in light of the 2 limiting factors in v 12: time and chance.

In our culture, we don’t like to talk or think about death much. Still, the Teacher emphasizes that death cannot be avoided. Realizing this fact should influence the way we live. God’s word helps us see life as a gift and encourages us to make the most of the time God gives us.

In light of these verses, seize the opportunities as they occur and make the most while you can; a further warning to “seize the day”.

**[Slide 10] Read Ecc 9:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. <sup>14</sup> There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. <sup>15</sup> But there was found in it a

poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. <sup>16</sup> But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

While the specific reference is not mentioned, it is similar to two events recorded in scripture: Judges 9:50-55 and 2 Sam. 20:15-22

Wisdom is always close to the teacher's mind, and in this section he has some thoughts about it. **Wisdom often is not appreciated.**

The humble circumstances of the poor person count against him and his wisdom is sometimes unheeded. Having wisdom can help us recognize wisdom in unexpected places.

**Discuss: What was the poor wise man's reward for saving the city?**

(Nothing...no one remembered him.) Still, it was his wisdom that delivered the city.

Earthly reward vs heavenly reward.

**[Slide 11] Read Ecc 9:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. <sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

It's not the volume, but the value of wisdom. Human politics often involves a loud voice and weapons. (There is nothing new under the sun.)

"sinner" in contrast with wisdom would indicate moral error and absence of acting wisely.

Scriptural examples for Ecc. 9:18,

**[Slide 12] Joshua 7, when Achan disobeyed: (highlights here) (p 182)**

Jos. 6:18 **But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, so that you do not covet them and take some of the things under the ban, and make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.**

Jos. 7:11 **Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban**



and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.

[Slide 13] Jos. 7:20-21 So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

[Slide 14] Also, 1 Sam. 22:18 when Doeg killed the priests. (p 245)

Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and attack the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.

[Slide 15] repeat of Slide 11, 9:17-18

There is nothing new under the sun...

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 10

### The Power of Foolishness

*Foolishness can be powerful, and with unintended consequences.*

Chapter 10 includes proverbs, which could be picked up and dropped into the Book of Proverbs and we'd never be able to tell the difference.

Read 10:1 in conjunction with 9:18 (Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good). Same major point; a little foolishness destroys a whole lot of wisdom.

**[Slide 2] Read Ecc 10:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

<sup>2</sup> A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

<sup>3</sup> Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

<sup>4</sup> If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

(10:1) Doesn't take much of anything to result in spoilage of the full amount, so too with foolishness.

(10:2) To have one's heart inclined to the right is to be upright, skillful and resourceful in one's daily life. Lefthandedness was linked to incompetence. (Latin: sinister, dexter)

(10:3) We can recognize a fool when we see his actions.

(10:4) Prov. 16:14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it. Stay the course.

Recall also the fate of Haman in the book of Esther. The gallows had been prepared for Mordecai.

**[Slide 3] Read Ecc 10:5-7**

<sup>5</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: <sup>6</sup> folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. <sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

Wisdom and wealth are not interdependent. One can have one without the other.

As we see in v5-7, the rich and powerful are not immune to destructive power of foolishness.

People with resources (the rich) may lack opportunity; people with opportunity (princes) may lack resources.

**[Slide 4] Read Ecc 10:8-11**

<sup>8</sup> He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

<sup>9</sup> He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

<sup>10</sup> If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

<sup>11</sup> If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

This section (stanza) has a construction theme, safety first, use caution. (Ever turned over rocks in the yard? Bugs, snakes, etc.) Dull tools require more effort, a wise worker attends to what he needs.)

Snake charming – neat trick, but risky (foolish?) to be playing with uncharmed snake.

Even in our physical labors, wisdom is necessary for best results.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 10:12-15**

<sup>12</sup> The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

<sup>13</sup> The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

<sup>14</sup> A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

<sup>15</sup> The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

Speaking wisely can earn respect from others, speaking foolishly destroys any respect one might have. The people who talk the most have the least to say.

When foolish people work, they accomplish nothing because they work to no purpose.

**[Slide 6] Read Ecc 10:16-18**

<sup>16</sup> Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

<sup>17</sup> Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

<sup>18</sup> Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

“your princes feast in the morning”

Not referring to chronological age but rather to maturity. If your land is ruled by immature people who party at all hours of the day, you are in trouble. Wise rulers feast at proper times.

**[Slide 7] Child: na'ar (300 instances in OT) It's use:**

- A Servant of Abraham (Gen 18:7)
- 17 year old Joseph (Gen 37:2)
- Baby Moses in basket boat (Ex 2:6)
- A Young priest (Judges 17:12)
- Absalom when he was old enough to seize control in Jerusalem (2 Sam 18:5)
- Jereboam when he rose to a position of prominence (1 Ki 11:28)

There is a handout on na'ar in the webspace.

Context here: as one who lacks experience and wisdom.

(10:18) Keep your house in order. While physical here, much of Ecclesiastes extols the need to keep our “house” in order.

**[Slide 8] Read Ecc 10:19-20**

<sup>19</sup> Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

<sup>20</sup> Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

(10:19) God gives us good gifts to use. We need to keep those in proper perspective.

The verse can be read at different levels:

- A comment on human values.
- Sober advice to earn a good living rather than having a good time.
- Stating the versatility of money. It answers everything in that it can influence a situation – this too calls for wisdom. How we use it shows wisdom or folly.

(10:20) “A little birdie told me”. Actually is a proverb in many cultures, dating back at least to the ancient Hittites.

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 11

### Take a Chance

What if the Wright Brothers didn't take a chance?

Who decided to make the first cup of tea?

Sometimes we have to take risks in order to succeed. This is an idea the Teacher will focus on in Ecc 11.

**[Slide 2] Read Ecc 11:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

<sup>2</sup> Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

<sup>3</sup> If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

<sup>4</sup> He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

While the theme of Ch 11 is different, the style is the same. It begins with some proverbs.

Discuss: You might have heard Ecc 11:1 before, but what does it mean?

Scholars have suggested 2 possibilities:

- The teacher is advocating generosity or hospitality. (if you are helpful to others, they often will be helpful to you)
- The teacher is offering investment advice. (in ancient times, doing business overseas was one type of investing that offered great potential for profit. Mediterranean port cities were popular places for importing and exporting.) (Nothing new under the sun)

Diversified investments usually means better protection.

So which option? The interpretations are not too different. Both have a sense of investment, whether a business venture or in relationships. Looking for a future return when we are in need.

Ecc 11:2 – not a literal number, but rather “plenty” or “more than plenty”

Ecc 11:3-4 look like weather advice, but they are related to 1-2.

- Seasons are going to change.
- Rains will come according to God’s timetable.
- Do not use uncertainty as an excuse for laziness.

Knowing when to plant, harvest or travel depends on the cycles of nature, not our own desires or schedules. While farmers now the cycle of the seasons, they do not know exactly what will happen. Farming (and life in general) requires risk.

“A time to plant and a time to reap” generally, but who knows the weather tomorrow?

**[Slide 3] Read Ecc 11:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb[a] of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

<sup>6</sup> In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

**[Slide 4]**

**11:5 ESV As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.**

**11:5 NASB Just as you do not know the path of the wind, and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes everything.**

Ruach can mean “wind” and “spirit” (sim to pneuma in greek)

\*Either translation is absolutely true.

Gen. 1:2 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.

(Ruach Elohim)

The work of God is ultimately mysterious and beyond our understanding. “hebel”.

In light of this, what is our approach...

- Throw up our hands in despair?
- Work diligently so we can be as prepared as possible for uncertainty?

Actually in Ch 11, the teacher is helping to balance what he has said in earlier chapters. Since we are not in control, we might be tempted to never take a chance on anything. But the teacher is saying the opposite.

- If you don't try, you'll never accomplish anything.
- If you wait for a perfect opportunity, you'll never act.
- A wise person will do all the planning he/she can, then take appropriate risks.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 11:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.[b]

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

<sup>10</sup> Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain[c] from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

So in light of the uncertainty we've seen the teacher refer to, celebrate the light we have. Life is short compared to death; make the most of what we have. Our society/culture strives to prolong life (anti-aging creams, vitamins, health spas, anti-oxidants, etc) We try not to use the word death. We say, “he passed”. But



the teacher refloats on death to help us live more fully in the present. Life is hebel. Brief and fleeting. Enjoy it!

Hold our joys of present life loosely, with the awareness that such joy is temporary.

**[Slide 6]** Note the warning in verse 9: we saw it in 3:17, we will see it again in 12:14. Remember our handling of #YOLO.

*As a historical note, similar teaching is found in the Instruction of Ptahhotep from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt: "Follow your heart as long as you live, / Do no more than is required, / do not shorten the time of 'follow-the-heart.'" (ca.1900 BC) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30508/30508-h/30508-h.htm> , Section B, Number 11.*

*The similarity of the Egyptian and biblical exhortations to "rejoice in" and "follow" the heart is striking, **although the Bible is distinctive for linking this concept to a fear of God.***

11:10 – banish anxiety; cast off troubles. (There is nothing new under the sun)

**[Slide 7]** Isaiah 26:3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

1Pe5:7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

11:10 – youth and vigor are hebel – meaningless in the long term; brief – hold that thought as we move into the context of chapter 12.

# Ecclesiastes

## Chapter 12

### **The End of the Matter**

[Slide 2] What do you want on your tombstone? (Anyone remember the pizza commercial?)

In other words, how do you sum up your life?

Chapter 12 has two parts. The first 8 verses wrap up the “Vanity of vanities” section we’ve been in since chapter 1.

[Slide 3] Read Ecc 12:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; <sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, <sup>3</sup> in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, <sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—

Notice that verses 1-7 comprise a single sentence. There are a lot of “and” in this set of verses. At first glance it looks depressing, but it’s part of the “hebel” – the fleeting, mysterious, breath we’ve been looking at.

He mentions “evil days”, which sounds similar to the “days of darkness” which the teacher discussed in 11:8, “So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”

They are related, but two distinct ideas. In 11:8. The teacher was discussing death, and here he is referring to old age – the future time when one can no longer enjoy life in the same way.

These verses contain a series of metaphors related to the aging process. The teacher uses comments out the decay of a house to refer to the decay of the human body. As we've seen before there are literal (L) and figurative (F) similarities that apply.

(12:2) before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened.

L: Failing eyesight – everything becomes dimmer.

F: Brightness or enjoyment of life is dimmed. “No pleasure” in 12:1

(12:3) the keepers of the house tremble

L: Older people have shaky hands.

F: Fear, not being able to protect the household.

(12:3) the strong men are bent

L: Stooped back, less powerful bodies.

(12:3) the grinders cease because they are few

L: reference to teeth. Dentures are in use today.

(12:3) those who look through the windows are dimmed.

L: Dimming eyesight that comes with old age.

(12:4) one rises up at the sound of a bird.

L: As people get older it is increasingly difficult to sleep through the night. Also, tendency for older people to wake up early as the birds.

(12:4) daughters of song are brought low

L: deafness

#### **[Slide 4] Read Ecc 12:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— <sup>6</sup> before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, <sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the

earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. <sup>8</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

(12:5) afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way

L: Moving from place to place is a physical struggle. Climbing stairs or walking on a hill is very difficult when you are old. Fear of fatigue.

(12:5) almond tree blossoms

L: almond trees bloom white. Reference to hair color as we get old.

(12:5) Desire fails

L: no desire for physical relations.

(12:6-7) before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

L: physical death.

This section ends with the familiar “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” This is the inclusio – the second bookend. 1:1-12:8 is that section.

So verse 9 starts the conclusion. Some scholars believe this last section was written by a later editor.

Some possibilities:

1. Same author, he just changes to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person voice to separate the section literarily (not literally)
2. Addition by an editor who is trying to bring the many thoughts to a conclusion.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 12:9-14**

<sup>9</sup> Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. <sup>10</sup> The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

<sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. <sup>12</sup> My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Goads – pointed sticks to prod oxen to go in the direction you want.

**Discuss: How are collected sayings like nails firmly fixed?**

Wise guidance and words of wisdom are foundational. Work and study are good things, but it is easy to get out of balance and overdo it.

**[Slide 6]**

<sup>13</sup> The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. <sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

V13-14 tie it all up. This is the meaning of life.

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**[Slide 7] Main points from study (shown on p128 of Why Are We Here?):**

- Importance of fearing God & keeping His commandments.
- “hebel” the briefness and mystery of life.
- The things people chase after lack lasting significance (money, fame, relationships, accomplishments)
- Carpe Diem – make the most of what God has provided.
- Human wisdom is valuable but has its limits.
- Work is a good thing, but not the only thing.
- God is in control, even when it seems He is not.
- There are different seasons in life; we should appreciate the present season.