

The Book of Ecclesiastes

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Outline for the book of Ecclesiastes

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Chapter 1: The Puzzle of Life

Scripture: Ecclesiastes Overview

Overview

Ecclesiastes is one of the most puzzling and difficult books of the Bible. Many of its statements sound odd in the Bible, for they suggest that life is meaningless. However, when we read the book as a whole, we discover it has a powerful message that life is significant when God is at its center. This is a highly relevant book for modern men and women today are frustrated with life.

Outline

I. Authorship and Date

IV. Theme

II. Structure

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III. Purpose

I. Authorship and Date

Unlike many books of the Bible, the author of Ecclesiastes does not state his name. Traditionally, the book has been attributed to Solomon and there are a number of pieces of evidence support Solomon as author. The writer, like Solomon, had unparalleled wisdom (1:16), unequalled wealth (2:8), ample opportunities for pleasure (2:3, 10) and extensive building activities (2:4-6). Moreover, Ecclesiastes has striking similarities to Proverbs emphasizing both wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

The identification of the writer as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” could refer to another son of David, however, in the light of the other evidence, it most likely refers to Solomon.

Solomon analyzed life carefully. He had a restless spirit, for he wanted to find true, lasting satisfaction in life. He wanted to discover eternal significance that surpassed material possessions and human achievements. He was not content with pleasures in life; he insisted on finding true fulfillment and meaning.

Solomon wrote this book during the time of Israel’s greatest power and prosperity. Though on the surface everything seemed fine in Israel, underneath there were deep problems that caused the kingdom to split apart after Solomon’s death. In addition, Solomon himself experience spiritual struggles in his latter years. Ecclesiastes may be the written record of his own search. It reveals the struggle of a man who seemed to have all the wealth, women, and wine, but who felt empty inside.

II. Structure

When we read a book, we expect the author to take us directly from one point to the next. A novel does not skip around from in a careless way. The plot moves along a logical progression.

Most of the books of the Bible follow this kind of linear progression. However, Ecclesiastes takes a different approach. Instead of moving in a straight line, Ecclesiastes is more like a set of circles that keep returning to the same point. Eventually, the book get to its main point, but on the way, Solomon takes the reader along the journey that he took in trying to find meaning in life.

His approach reproduces in the reader the feelings of futility that Solomon had. By the end of the book, the reader not only knows the answer but feels the pain of the problem and appreciates the significance of the solution.

We can see only part of what is happening in life, and that part leaves us restless and frustrated. But God knows what He is doing and He will evaluate what every person does in life. This conclusion forms the framework in which the rest of the book must be interpreted.

III. Purpose

Because the content of Ecclesiastes differs from the rest of the Bible, many people have wondered why it is included in God's Word. When the book is seen as a whole, several purposes emerge.

1. Ecclesiastes was written to satisfy the hunger to understand how all of life fits into a meaningful pattern. Each person's life is brief. He is one of about 7 billion people on this planet, and he lives for only a few years. That raises a troubling question: What is a person's life worth in the larger picture? Ecclesiastes affirms that the life lived in the fear of God is indeed part of God's eternal plan.
2. Ecclesiastes address the boredom of the routine of the average life. Solomon speaks of the disillusion of the person who works to eat, eats to live, and lives to work. He destroys the notion that a person's work determines a person's worth, for work without God is worthless. By tearing down this misconception, Solomon clears the way for his positive message.
3. Ecclesiastes calls the world to develop a God-centered view of life. In each of the four observations of life, Solomon refers to God's design for life, which builds toward his conclusion that meaning in life comes only when we fear God and keep His commandments.
4. Ecclesiastes tries to convince the reader that life that does not rise above human efforts is useless. A favorite expression in the book is "under the sun." What Solomon does is to say, "For sake of the argument, let's leave God out of the picture. Can we then find satisfaction under the sun, that is, only in the human realm?" Of course, the answer is no, so Solomon repeatedly took the reader back to the need to fear God and be obedient to Him.
5. Ecclesiastes tries to answer a major puzzle of life: Why can a person have everything this world offers yet feel so empty? It looks at the unusual cases where money & happiness do not go together.
6. Ecclesiastes challenges the young to reflect on the issues of life and to choose to obey God (11:9-12:7). Solomon does not want others to waste their lives going around in meaningless circles. He desires that his testimony may spare other people the pain he had experienced. Their lives can be more fulfilling if they learn early on to fear God and strive to obey him in every area of their lives.

IV. Theme

1. Solomon taught that life leaves many questions unanswered. A key word in the book is the Hebrew term *bebel*, which is most often translated “vanity.” This term has been rendered in several different ways, but it is best to translate it as “puzzling.” Ecclesiastes says that life is fundamentally frustrating because it contains puzzles that the human mind cannot solve. Life does not always follow the general rules. Good people do not always prosper. Rich people are not always happy.
2. Ecclesiastes encourages us to enjoy life but at the same time to be accountable to God. The fact that life is puzzling is no reason to give up on it. We must keep our lives anchored to God but also be sure to live life to its fullest. This book encourages people to jump into life rather than holding back in fear and worry.
3. Ecclesiastes demonstrates that true meaning in life cannot be found in the temporal, earthly sphere. Solomon searched for fulfillment “under the sun,” leaving God out of the picture. However, he kept coming to the conclusion that human effort apart from God leads only to frustration and meaninglessness. No amount of material possessions, personal achievements, or temporal pleasures can bring lasting joy and meaning to life.
4. God has created humans with an eternal hunger. We are unique, because God created us in His image. Therefore, we are dissatisfied with merely temporal achievements and pleasures. We must seek outside of ourselves and of the temporal, human realm to find something to fill hearts which God created to function for eternity.
5. Throughout Ecclesiastes the prospect of death is always in the background. Therefore, it is crucial that we invest life in what will last for eternity. We must not squander it on things destined to perish.
6. Ecclesiastes assures us that only God gives joy. Life is bleak without Him in the picture. The unending cycle of life and death has no reason. However, Solomon states that despite all the puzzles and disappointments of life, we can have joy, because joy in life is a gift from God.

When we read Ecclesiastes carefully, we find a message of optimism and hope. Life “under the sun” is disillusioning, but life does not have to be that way. When we take God into account, our eternal hunger is satisfied, we have joy in the face of life’s puzzles, and we have hope for the future.

V. Significance

Solomon dared to ask the hard questions that challenge our thinking. Instead of using his possessions, power, and pleasures to drown out his feeling of frustration, he faced the issue of significance. In doing this, Solomon followed the same course many others have traveled.

In modern times many leading thinkers have given up on life. Some people give themselves over to pleasures in an attempt to deny the gnawing pain they have in their hearts. Others conclude that life has no meaning at all – that it is absurd and that the only way out is death.

Ecclesiastes is such a powerful book for modern people because it gives solid answers to these troubling issues. Solomon did not leave us in the despair of disillusionment or take us on a flight of fear. Instead, he turned to the one source of significant life, God. He challenged his readers to fear God and to keep His commandments, for only He can give life.

Ecclesiastes is a book of hope addressed to people who have given up on life. It speaks to people in our culture where they are and takes them directly to the Lord. What a significant book for our time.

Chapter 2: All is Vanity under the Sun

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Overview

Solomon began the book on a frustrated note. Where he looked, life seemed to be a series of circles. He saw a lot of effort and exertion, but no meaningful progress. Therefore, he concluded that life is meaning less or puzzling. It is this puzzle that he set out to solve in Ecclesiastes.

Outline

I. Title (1:1)

III. Trial (1:4-11)

II. Thesis (1:2, 3)

A. Evidence in nature (1:4-8)

A. Puzzle of life (1:2)

B. Evidence in history (1:9-11)

B. Profit of life (1:3)

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 is the prologue to Solomon's discussion of human significance. Solomon looked at life but saw only that nature and history go around and around in circles. It looked as though there is no real progress in the world. If his observation was accurate, then life does not make sense. In Solomon's words, "All is vanity." That raises the question that Solomon endeavored to answer in the rest of the book: "What profit can a person have for all of his effort in life?"

I. Title (1:1)

It is clear that the term "Preacher" refers to Solomon, although the book doesn't identify him by name. Solomon was the unparalleled wise man in Israel's history (1 Kings 4:29-34). In the book of Proverbs, Solomon collected "sayings" of practical wisdom. The proverbs describe how life typically works in God's ordered world. Ecclesiastes is noticeably different from Proverbs because it discusses why life does not always seem to make sense.

II. Thesis (1:2, 3)

Solomon began by giving his initial verdict on life. Right from the start, he identified the problem that he was going to examine.

A. Puzzle of life (1:2)

Solomon uttered his indictment against life, “vanity of vanities; all in vanity” (v. 2). The word “vanity,” literally means a vapor or breath. Have you seen your breath? It is brief and empty. So, life is empty, and therefore puzzling. Despite all its promise, life is a meaningless disappointment.

Solomon’s observation about the vanity of life may seem pessimistic, but Solomon was not a pessimist. He simply started his book from the point of view of those who live without God. As they search for fulfillment and meaning in life apart from God, they cannot make any sense of it. They are not able to find lasting meaning to their existence.

Solomon himself may have gone through this struggle during a period in his life. If so, this book traces his journey from looking for fulfillment apart from God to finding fulfillment in relationship with God.

This organization of Ecclesiastes suggests that the book was not written to edify the believer so much as to evangelize the unbeliever. The person who has no place for God can relate to Solomon’s message. Solomon spoke the language of the person who tries to live without God. Throughout the book unbelievers can see themselves in the mirror that Solomon holds up to them. They can identify with the questions, pain, and frustration Ecclesiastes unravels. In doing that, they may become open to the solution that Solomon offers at the end of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon looked at life, considered its value and concluded that all is “vanity.” He found that human achievements are short-lived, life is puzzling, and things do not work out as planned. Being good or wise is not always an advantage. Life just has too many variables to allow it to be predictable.

B. Profit of life (1:3)

The major question asked by Ecclesiastes is found in verse 3: “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” The term “profit” was likely a commercial expression for the net earnings after the expenses have been paid. Solomon wanted to determine if anything would be left over after subtracting life’s pains and problems from its pleasures. Only if something remained could he say that life has profit.

One of Solomon’s key considerations was that life includes labor. When Adam and Eve fell into sin (Gen. 3), God insisted that humans toil by the sweat of their brows. Solomon faces the issue squarely: life is laced with pain, work is often hard, humans often have a pained existence. Since these conditions exist, do any compensations make all the labor worthwhile?

In effect, Solomon said, “let us assume that all there is to life is what we have here on earth. Can we then find profit in our labor?” Solomon started right where people are asking their questions.

Ecclesiastes asks the question, “Is all my effort I put into life going to make my life meaningful?” Most people assume that if they just had something different or something more, life would be profitable. Solomon showed how wrong that thinking is. He knew from experience that the world provides no profit of fulfillment when all the pain and toil of life are deducted. The person who lives without God can experience only the bitter taste of emptiness.

III. Trial (1:4-11)

Solomon formed his theory by examining life around him. He probed life as a prosecutor presses a legal case. He conducted a trial to determine whether human labor is profitable or futile. He found that in nature and in human life everything seems to go around in circles. There is no real progress or profit – just unchanging boredom of meaningless existence.

A. Evidence in nature (1:4-8)

As Solomon studied nature, he saw the same picture everywhere: everything was changing, yet everything remained the same. Under the sun there is only endless repetition.

1.4 - Just as waves repeatedly beat upon a seashore so one generation of people dies and another takes its place, but the earth remains the same. He then gives three specific illustrations from nature in verses 5-7. Just as human generations form an unchanging cycle, so the physical world is comprised of continuously repeating actions.

1.5 - The rising and setting of the sun each morning is an ever-present reminder of the cyclical course of nature. This points out the brevity of life, for once a person’s life has run its course, it is finished.

1.6 - The second illustration is the wind. It moves toward the south and back to the north. Following the great air currents, the wind continually whirls about.

1.7 - In the third picture, Solomon described the water cycle. Water flows into rivers that eventually empty into the sea. But the seas never become full because water is always evaporating into the atmosphere. The water vapor in the atmosphere condenses into water droplets, which fall as rain and other forms of precipitation. Then the whole cycle repeats itself.

1.8 - Solomon concluded that looking at life without taking God into account produces only frustration and heartache.

B. Evidence in history (1:9-11)

Nature is not the only mirror that reveals the meaninglessness of human life. In verses 9-11 Solomon looked at evidence from history and came to the same painful conclusion.

1.9 - Solomon claimed that there is no significant progress in history. Without God in the picture, life is like spinning wheels in a rut. A lot of effort may take place, but nothing of significance happens.

1.10 - Solomon asked if anything in life is genuinely new. We may think immediately of recent advances in science and technology and say they are new. Man is definitely making advances, but they are in the same realms in which previous generations made advances.

For example, going to the moon is advancement in exploration, but exploring is not new. Adam began exploring after he was created when he took his first walk through the Garden of Eden. Research in the fields of medicine and science are clearly more advanced today that they were even fifty years ago. But studying science and medicine are nearly as old as Adam himself.

Furthermore, though the modern period has seen many advances, much knowledge and many skills have been forgotten. For example, no one has yet figured out how the pyramids in Egypt were built. The net gain may be far less than we might suppose. In fact, in many cases it is likely that researchers are rediscovering previously known facts.

Just as the physical world has unchanging round of activity, so human knowledge moves in cycles of discovery and forgetting.

1.11 - Solomon took his point a step further. Just as people forget what happened before them, so they will be forgotten by future generation. A person may work hard to find something new, however, if it is forgotten by future generations, then for all practical purposes their efforts were wasted.

Prominent people will be virtually forgotten. A life devoted to personal achievement cannot bring lasting fulfillment. When God is left out, no amount of effort can provide fulfillment and stability.

This introduction to Ecclesiastes paints a dismal picture for those who have no room for God in their lives. Solomon was honest in showing the waste of a life without the Lord. However, for those who listen to the full message of the wise, they will learn in the end that there is hope.

Chapter 3: Searching for Meaning

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Overview

Solomon decided to search “under the sun” to see if he could find meaning apart from God. He conducted two experiments to see if he could achieve lasting fulfillment through wisdom or through pleasure. He found that both wisdom and pleasure fell short of lasting enjoyment which he desired.

Outline

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| I. Explanation (1:12-15) | III. Evaluation (2:12-23) |
| II. Experiment (1:16 - 2:11) | A. Of wisdom (2:12-17) |
| A. Wisdom (1:16-18) | B. Of pleasure (2:18-23) |
| B. Pleasure (2:1-11) | IV. Exhortation (2:24-26) |

I. Explanation (1:12-15)

1.12 - Solomon described his first observation of life by giving a preview of what he had found. In ancient times, kings were regarded as the primary source of wisdom and unlimited power to do as he pleased. This power enabled Solomon to use all the advantages of his position as he looked for meaning in life. If the king with all of his special opportunities could not achieve satisfaction, then life truly was vanity.

1.13 - Solomon's search was intensive and exhaustive; he scrutinized life in detail. Nevertheless, no matter how far he searched, he always came to the same disappointing conclusion: God has given mankind a painful existence that involves much strenuous labor.

1.14 - Solomon summarized his conclusions: I have seen all there is, and it is all meaningless. He found nothing that provided true fulfillment or satisfaction.

1.15 - Without God, what happens in life is without meaning and beyond control. Many things are crooked, for they do not correspond to what is right and just. However, as far as Solomon could determine, we are powerless to make them straight. Human intellect alone lacks the ability to answer the puzzles of life.

II. Experiment (1:16 – 2:11)

A. Wisdom (1:16-18)

Solomon told us of the path he took that led him to his disappointing conclusion. First, he tried the road of wisdom to see if it would find fulfillment in life.

1.16 - Solomon was noted for his unrivaled wisdom. He resolved to use his great experience of wisdom and knowledge to find meaning in life. He thought that he, with all his wisdom, could surely discover a satisfying answer to the meaning of life.

1.17 - Solomon gave himself to the challenge. He searched the full range of human experience, from wisdom to madness to folly. He looked at the good and the bad, trying to scrutinize life exhaustingly. He overlooked almost nothing in the sphere of human experience. However, there was one glaring omission in Solomon's search.

Proverbs 9:10 teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Solomon looked everywhere but the right place for the insight he needed. He was trying to find under the sun what can only be found in God alone.

1.18 - The more he learned in his search, the more he realized that life is grievous apart from God. The best human understanding led only to more pain and sorrow. If Solomon were to find fulfillment, it would not come in human reason. It would have to come from some other source.

B. Pleasure (2:1-11)

After finding that human wisdom leads to disappointment, Solomon investigated the path of pleasure. As the king, he had resources and freedom to do as he pleased; therefore, he used every opportunity to satisfy his heart.

In pursuing pleasure, Solomon did not just give himself to wild abandon. Instead, he resolved to “prove” himself with mirth and pleasure. The word he used meant to explore in a careful, scientific manner. His search, however, was doomed from the start, for he again left God out of the picture.

2.1-2 - Solomon found that pleasure, too, was vanity. Even though it might produce some temporary laughter, it could not yield lasting satisfaction in life.

2.3 - Solomon attempted to hold on to both wisdom and pleasure. He wanted to see if they could truly enjoy their lives without God.

2.4-8 - Solomon designed and constructed architectural masterpieces: houses, vineyards, gardens, orchard, and pools. In addition, he collected a household of servants. His holdings in cattle surpassed those of Saul and David, and he accumulated a vast amount of silver and gold. The palace was full of musicians and women. Solomon had arranged for the full range of his pleasures to be indulged at a moment’s notice. If pleasure could give satisfaction, Solomon would achieve it.

2.9 - He had surpassed his predecessors in power, wealth, culture, and achievements.

2.10 - Solomon had accomplished many enjoyable things. His construction projects and possessions gave him legitimate joy. By his labor he produced many things that brought him pleasure.

2.11 – But it was painful for him to realize that his effort cost more than the results he achieved. Consequently, he concluded that the search for satisfaction through pleasure was “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

In 1:3 Solomon asked the question: What profit is left when we subtract life’s efforts from life’s accomplishments? In pleasure he found some joy, but the enjoyment was not close to what it cost. Pleasure without God yielded no profit. Once again Solomon was forced to turn away disappointed.

III. Evaluation (2:12-23)

Solomon evaluated what he had learned from his experiments. He continued to search; and at each stage, he summarized what he had discovered to that point.

A. Of wisdom (2:12-17)

2.12-14 - Solomon realized that his attempt to find fulfillment in life surpassed what people with ordinary resources could attempt. However, Solomon with all his wisdom and wealth, admitted the reality that death comes to all.

2.15-16 - If both wisdom and folly lead to death, then all of his efforts to search for human wisdom were vain. After death, all people – wise and foolish alike – are forgotten. Wisdom required more work, but it yielded no more lasting benefit than folly.

2.17 - Solomon concluded bitterly that he hated life. All his effort to understand how life works was painful and frustrating. As Solomon viewed it, life is “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

B. Of pleasure (2:18-23)

2.18 - Death not only brought a person’s work to an end, but it also meant that whatever was achieved faced an uncertain future. No one can take earthly pleasures beyond the grave. No doubt, Solomon could point to numerous examples in which sons squandered all their father’s accomplishments. That realization of human nature turned his pleasure into pain in his mind.

2.19 - Solomon asked bitterly whether a man’s heirs would use his possessions wisely or foolishly. For good or for bad, an heir will have total control of his deceased father’s assets. The second generation could completely undo what the prior generation has achieved. This, too, was a frustrating reality of life.

2.20 - This observation caused Solomon to despair that his work could bring him satisfaction. He knew that he had no choice but to resign himself to the fact that he could not control what even the next generation did. Since that was the case, his life’s work could not yield lasting joy.

2.21 - As Solomon went on to discuss that all that a person accomplishes will be left to others, and could possibly be misused. How, then, could Solomon derive pleasure from his activities when the future cast such a shadow over them? Therefore, he said, “This also is vanity and a great evil”.

2.22-23 - From what Solomon had seen, life was full of labor that produced only vexation of heart. All man’s activities under the sun lead only to bitterness, regret, and hopelessness. He wondered, “What is the use?” Even if man were to labor through the night, he could not guarantee the future of what he attained. Both the search for wisdom and the search for pleasure led Solomon to the same place: disillusion and despair.

IV. Exhortation (2:24-26)

After evaluating what he had found as he examined wisdom and pleasure, Solomon gave a somewhat surprising exhortation in verses 24-26. As he scrutinized life under the sun, he became disappointed. However, at the end of the first round of observation he gave a ray of hope.

2.24-26 - Solomon recommended that his readers enjoy life as a gift from God’s hand. Human labor was important, but Solomon taught that people must not find their fulfillment in their own accomplishments, but in what God alone can give.

People see life as meaningless when they try to get enjoyment through their efforts alone. However, with God in the picture there is hope. Life can have meaning. Life can be fulfilling.

Chapter 4: There Must Be Something Better

Scripture: Ecclesiastes chapters 3 – 4

Overview

Solomon states that the sovereign God has determined everything that affects humans. Although the world seems unpredictable, God is in control of it. He has created humans with a thirst for what only He can give. This truth provides the necessary perspective for life in an apparently unjust world.

Outline

I. Principle (3:1-15)

A. Theme (3:1)

B. Illustrations (3:2-8)

C. Evaluation (3:9-11)

D. Application (3:12-15)

II. Problems (3:16 – 4:16)

A. Injustice (3:16, 17)

B. Death (3:18-22)

C. Oppression (4:1-3)

D. Envy (4:4-6)

E. Loneliness (4:7-12)

F. Change (4:13-16)

I. Principle (3:1-15)

As Solomon began his second observation of life, he developed a key principle in Ecclesiastes 3:1-15. He stated it in verse 1, and then he illustrated, evaluated, and applied it.

A. Theme (3:1)

Solomon asserted that God has a plan that includes every person and all that people do at all times. The sovereign God has ordained everything in human affairs. Life may seem vain, because we cannot control what happens. However, God has appointed a season for every event in life, and there is a suitable time in God's plan for every purpose under the heavens. Solomon was learning that only submission to the sovereign God can bring true purpose and meaning to life.

B. Illustrations (3:2-8)

Solomon illustrated the range of God's control by citing fourteen pairs of opposite activities. By stating the extremes, Solomon implied that God also controls everything between the extremes (i.e. from the moment of birth to the moment of death). Only God holds the key to life, and therefore, to human fulfillment.

C. Evaluation (3:9-11)

After showing the range of God's sovereign control, Solomon evaluated its significance.

3.9 - Once again, he asked the key question of the book and of life. The contrasts in verses 2 – 8 revealed that one human activity cancels out another, leaving a net profit of zero. When life is viewed under the sun, there is no prospect for profit.

3.10 - Solomon concluded that God has designed life to fit His purpose.

3.11 - God hath set the “world in their heart”. Most people render the word “world” to mean eternity and make applications. However, I think it means that God designed man to focus on the time that we are on earth so that we can't see Him working out His purposes throughout all of the ages. Why? The NT explains that there are some mysteries in the OT that are explained in the NT.

D. Application (3:12-15)

Solomon reaffirmed the conclusion made earlier that God is in control, and the best thing we can do is live joyfully within the boundaries established by Him. It is impossible for anyone to understand fully the mystery of life, for God has not made everything known to us.

3.12 - We can't understand life as much as we like, but we still can accept life as God's good gift to us.

3.13 - Solomon advised his readers to view life positively. Instead of despairing, they should delight. Instead of mourning, they should enjoy mirth. Instead of giving up, they should rejoice. God has given life as His good gift. Life is not a curse to avoid but a blessing to embrace.

3.14 - God has designed the world so that we cannot comprehend or control it. Think back to our study on Job and God's conversation with Job. God's purpose is to frustrate human pride, which tries to find fulfillment apart from God.

3.15 – God controls all of life. The world is completely under God's sovereign control, so life and joy can come only in God's way. Fulfillment does not result from freedom from God but from submission to His will.

II. Problems (3:16 – 4:16)

Solomon looked at six problems that seem to argue that God is not in control, but then suggested an answer for each one.

A. Injustice (3:16, 17)

3.16 - As Solomon looked at life, he noted that wickedness often seems to triumph over justice. Often, the guilty not only get away with their sin, but they also oppress the innocent. This injustice seemed to deny the fact of God's sovereign control over life.

3.17 - Solomon considered that God is the judge of all people, righteous, and wicked alike, will have to be judged by God. He will reward those who submit to His rule, and He will punish those who defy Him (hell). In His own time, God will settle it with the wicked, whether in this life or the next.

B. Death (3:18-22)

3.18-20 - The second apparent problem with God's sovereign control is that it appeared to Solomon that humans and animals die in the same way. If that observation were accurate, then the inequities of life would be especially troubling because once a person dies, there would be no future.

3.21-22 - The answer is the spiritual side to human life. God evaluates each person and determines each one's eternal destiny. We are not just residents of earth; God created us to dwell in Heaven. Human life does not end at the grave, as it does for animals, but people will live throughout eternity.

C. Oppression (4:1-3)

4.1 - The third problem that bothered Solomon was the oppression that he saw around him. Powerful men used their power to take advantage of those who were weak, and they seemed to get away with it. The oppressed were helpless in the face of unfair, oppressive treatment. This certainly seemed to contradict the fact of God's sovereign control of the world.

4.2-3 - Solomon responded by saying that this kind of life "under the sun" is worse than not having life at all. Without a relationship with God, a person has no comfort in the face of life's problems.

D. Envy (4:4-6)

4.4 - Solomon also considered the problem of intense competition, which leads to a spirit of envy. Within God's ordered world, diligent work usually leads to prosperity, but often others envy the person who succeeds.

4.5 - In light of the possibility of being envied for being successful, a person might be tempted to go to the other extreme and avoid work altogether. However, verse 5 shows that only a fool follows the self-destructive path of idleness.

4.6 - Solomon gave the solution to the problem. He acknowledged that a spirit of competitiveness often leads only to frustration and disappointment. Working hard does not necessarily lead to fulfillment. It is better to relax a bit and be satisfied with a little than to be consumed by the drive to get more. After all, even if a person succeeds, he will be envied by others.

E. Loneliness (4:7-12)

4.7-8 - Loneliness was the fifth problem. He observed that some people work industriously, giving up many pleasures and enjoyments, yet they have no one with whom to share the fruit of their labor. Inevitably they have to ask, "Why am I working so hard, when I have no one with whom to enjoy it?"

4.9 - Solomon demonstrated the benefits of companionship. Teamwork provides a greater reward than an individual can achieve alone. Three examples from life illustrate this.

4.10 - If one person falls, he is helpless to lift himself up. He needs a friend to assist him.

4.11 - One person lying alone can become cold, but two can keep each other warm.

4.12 - A single person is vulnerable to attack, but two people have strength together; and three provide even more support for one another.

F. Change (4:13-16)

4.13-16 - The final problem was change. Solomon drew a picture of two types of people different from each other: (1) a poor but wise child and (2) a foolish old king who refused to heed advice.

In all human affairs change is bound to come. Change touches everyone. Because of this, we should not place our hope in people but in God, whose control is unchanging. Only He can provide certainty in an ever-changing world.

Chapter 5: Wisdom for the Walk

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5

Overview

Solomon answered the basic question, "Where is profit in a world marked by folly and injustice?" He gave several reminders of the need to be sincere before God. Then he balanced the evident problem of social injustice with five principles revealing the disadvantages of riches. He ended chapter 5 with an exhortation to grasp joyfully what God has given.

Outline

I. Need for Sincerity before God (5:1-7)

A. Sincere worship (5:1)

B. Sincere words (5:2-7)

II. Problem of Social Injustice (5:8, 9)

III. Disadvantages of Riches (5:10-17)

A. The More We Have, the More We Want (v. 10)

B. The More We Have, the More We Spend (v. 11)

C. The More We Have, the More We Worry (v. 12)

D. The More We Have, the More We Have to Lose (vv. 13-15)

E. The More We Have, the More We Leave Behind (vv. 16, 17)

IV. Exhortation to Enjoy Life (5:18-20)

I. Need for Sincerity before God (5:1-7)

A. Sincere worship (v. 1)

Solomon recognized that the inequalities of life detailed in Ecclesiastes 3:16 – 4:16 could lead some people to reject God altogether. But that would not solve the problem; it would simply make it worse. Therefore, he encouraged his readers to continue to go to God's house rather than give up on worship. Running away from God could never lead to an answer – only to worse difficulties.

5.1 - Solomon advised his readers to worship God with the right attitude. Foolish people resist God's Word; but wise people receive it, for they are ready to listen to God.

B. Sincere words (5:2-7)

5.2 - Solomon counseled not to praise God hypocritically or promise more than you are committed to perform. He does not try to impress God with words that are not backed up with commitment.

5.3 - Just as a dream has much imagined activity but little tangible result, so a fool produces many words but little action.

5.4-5 - A vow was a voluntary commitment made to the Lord, usually for a brief period of time. It showed thanksgiving for God's favor or expressed devotion and love. It was never required, and not to make a vow was no sin. But, once a vow was made, the person was obligated to keep his word. It is better not to make a promise to God at all than to break a promise.

5.6 - He pictured a person who regretted having made a hasty vow and compounded his guilt by trying to avoid the responsibility.

5.7 - It is better to talk less and, instead, to fear God. Fearing God leads to faithful action. Rather than being caught in self-deception through insincere speech, it is much better to live in conscious submission to God.

II. Problem of Social Injustice (5:8, 9)

In Ecclesiastes 3:16 and 4:1 Solomon referred to the fact that injustice is a bitter, but ever present, reality of life. The problem of sin has destroyed not only relationship between God and humans but also the social relationships between humans. Ecclesiastes 5:8 and 9 are difficult to understand.

5.8 - Some interpret verse 8 as a skeptical view of human government. According to this view, it is oppression by the government from the local level to the highest level.

Others view verse 8 in a more positive way. They say it looks at human government realistically and admits that oppression and injustice exist. However, the checks and balances of levels of officials provide accountability that prevents total moral collapse.

5.9 - In a world of obvious injustice the fruitfulness of the earth does not discriminate. Humans will be unjust to one another, but the fruit of the earth does not (fields of rich/poor; rain on just/unjust).

III. Disadvantages of Riches (5:10-17)

People assumed that money is a cure to life's problems. Yes, life is full of injustices, but wealth could soften their pains. In other words, people try to buy their way to happiness.

Solomon had already stated, wealth apart from God ultimately brings no advantage. Therefore, it is foolish for a person to make money his chief aim. In this section, Solomon taught about the disadvantages of riches to show that pursuing money is the way to disappointment. We must turn wholeheartedly to God to find lasting fulfillment in an unjust world.

A. The More We Have, the More We Want (v. 10)

5.10 - What we want is always more than what we have. Materialism has an insatiable appetite. Riches seem to promise happiness and satisfaction, but they don't deliver. They are incapable of bring genuine contentment and joy. Those who seek fulfillment in what they possess find that they always feel that they need more.

B. The More We Have, the More We Spend (v. 11)

5.11 - If someone purchases a house, he also must purchase things to keep it up. If he buys a car, he also must spend time and money to maintain it. Once again, the pursuit of riches leads to disappointment.

C. The More We Have, the More We Worry (v. 12)

5.12 - Solomon pictured two men attempting to sleep at night. The first man, a common laborer, went to bed after a day of strenuous work. Although he may not have had a full meal, he had something valuable – the ability to enjoy a sound night's sleep. By way of contrast, Solomon wrote of a rich man who had everything money could buy, but he was unable to sleep soundly.

D. The More We Have, the More We Have to Lose (vv. 13-15)

5.13-15 - A person may work diligently to accumulate wealth, stockpile it, and hoard it. However, all of this labor could be devastated by a disaster - a fire, earthquake, drought, theft, or stock market collapse. One poor investment can impoverish a man by depleting his whole life's earnings. The truth is we enter life with nothing and leave life the same way.

E. The More We Have, the More We Leave Behind (vv. 16, 17)

5.16-17 - Because we cannot take wealth beyond the grave, working for it is like grasping the wind. Just as the wind cannot be seen or held, so a person is left with nothing tangible to show for all his effort. This led to the painful realization that the futile search for wealth leads only to frustration.

IV. Exhortation to Enjoy Life (5:18-20)

The inequities of life, which seem so puzzling, should not keep us from joy. The wise person sees past the superficial problems of life to seize what is eternally important. He recognizes that the only thing that lasts is what God gives. What God gives is life, so Solomon urged his readers to grasp life joyfully as a blessing from God's good hand.

5.18 - Solomon realized that life is brief but that its brevity is all the more reason to enjoy life of God's gift. He counseled that people should not make life such a chore that they miss its joy.

5.19-20 - We may be able to earn wealth, but only God can give the ability to enjoy life. The one who enjoys life as God's gift keeps life and death in proper perspective. He has only limited days in this life, but God has granted them for enjoyment, not for futility.

Chapter 6: When Life Seems Unfair

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 6:1 – 8:15

Overview

Solomon examined several alleged unfair variations in life. He observed that prosperity is not always as good as it appears because it does not necessarily provide true enjoyment. On the other hand, he noted that supposed problems are not always as bad as they might appear. Humans need wisdom to manage life, but they don't always find it. The truly wise person lives within God's structure and does not give up on life.

Outline

I. Prosperity Is Overrated (6:1-12)

A. Situation (6:1, 2)

B. Suppositions (6:3-6)

C. Satisfaction (6:7-9)

D. Sovereignty (6:10-12)

II. Problems Are Undervalued (7:1-14)

III. Wisdom is Good but Rare (7:15-29)

A. Focus of wisdom (7:15-18)

B. Profit of wisdom (7:19-22)

C. Rarity of wisdom (7:23-29)

IV. Submission Is Wise (8:1-15)

A. Instruction (8:1-3)

B. Reasons (8:4-8)

C. Application (8:9-14)

D. Exhortation (8:15)

In this section of Ecclesiastes, Solomon presented his third observation of life. He examined prosperity and found that people vastly overrate its benefits. On the other hand, they fail to recognize that problems are not always as bad as they fear. He challenged his readers to pursue wisdom that would enable them to enjoy life, even in the face of all that seemed unfair.

I. Prosperity Is Overrated (6:1-12)

Chapter 6 continues to speak about how prosperity is not always as good as it appears.

A. Situation (6:1, 2)

Solomon observed that many times humans have riches, but they are unable to enjoy these advantages. Solomon learned through experience that wealth without enjoyment is emptiness.

B. Suppositions (6:3-6)

Solomon expounded on his point by discussing two possible situations.

6.3 - First, he presented the scenario of a man who lived many years and had one hundred children. This man had two advantages. First, he had a family who would inherit his wealth. Second, he had a long life. However, Solomon reported that even this man had no enjoyment in life and did not receive a respectful burial. Despite all of his seeming advantages, his life was more tragic than a miscarriage.

6.4-5 - A child of a miscarriage would never suffer the emptiness of a life without joy. To be at rest as a stillborn, Solomon said, was better than living in frustration.

6.6 - The second example in verse 6 features a man who lived two thousand years without enjoyment. Through this person might have lived twice as long as Methuselah (Gen. 5:27), no length of time can make up for the lack of the quality of enjoyment.

C. Satisfaction (6:7-9)

6.7 - Solomon affirmed that human effort alone cannot fill the emptiness.

6.8 - This sense of dissatisfaction affects all classes of people – the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor. Human wisdom does not necessarily guarantee that a person will find enjoyment. Satisfaction is unrelated to what a person knows or to what he possesses.

6.9 - In other words, enjoy what you have, rather than crave what you cannot have.

D. Sovereignty (6:10-12)

6.10-11 - In order to enjoy life, people need to recognize God's control over them and submit to God.

6.12 – The answer to these two rhetorical questions is nobody but God.

II. Problems Are Undervalued (7:1-14)

After discussing why prosperity appears better than it is, Solomon looked at the other side of the picture. He wrote a number of proverbs that fit around the theme that problems are not as bad as they might appear.

7.2 - For example, he said that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. This is odd, for people prefer a party over a funeral. However, Solomon said that a funeral forces people to consider the important issues of life. Problems force us to consider what is important in life.

III. Wisdom Is Good but Rare (7:15-29)

Throughout Ecclesiastes Solomon tried to point his readers toward godly wisdom.

A. Focus of wisdom (7:15-18)

7.15 - Solomon acknowledged that righteous people do not always have a long life, but wicked people sometimes prosper. This was one of the mysteries of life that perplexed him.

7.16 - It sounds almost as though Solomon were counseling against wisdom. However, he was stating that true wisdom and true righteousness go beyond phony pious appearance.

7.17 - Resisting God's way by following wickedness and folly leads to destruction.

7.18 - Solomon exhorted his readers to follow God's way and avoid the way of foolishness.

B. Profit of wisdom (7:19-22)

7.19 - Solomon viewed wisdom as more effective than might for meeting life's challenges. A wise man can face life more successfully than ten strong men who lack wisdom.

7.20 - He implied that wisdom is not something that comes from within a person. Wisdom comes from God, and it provides direction and profitability in life that is otherwise missing.

7.21 - Solomon said we should not get overly upset by what others say.

7.22 - Wise speech is certainly profitable, but it is not always practiced.

C. Rarity of wisdom (7:23-29)

7.23-25 - Solomon found that finding true wisdom required more than simply determining to be wise. God must give wisdom.

7.26 - Solomon human folly that brought moral and spiritual destruction to many people.

7.27-28 - He concluded that extremely few men or women ever find God's way.

7.29 - God created us with the capacity to know Him. However, people have rejected God's way in order to follow their own foolish impulses.

IV. Submission Is Wise (8:1-15)

A. Instruction (8:1-3)

8.1 - Solomon observed that the wise understand how to live

8.2-3 - Solomon advised his readers to keep the king's commandment. Although there may be times that Christians must choose "to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), they must not be hasty to oppose the authorities that God has ordained.

B. Reasons (8:4-8)

8.4-7 - Solomon offered two reasons why man should submit to authority.

8.8 - Solomon cited four examples of how man is unable to control life. He cannot control the physical environment, determine the time of death, avoid calamities, and use wicked means to escape problems. No amount of human energy can guarantee a secure life.

C. Application (8:9-14)

Solomon's instruction to submit to authorities raises the obvious question: Why does government seem to produce inequality? If this is God's system, why is there so much injustice in the world?

8.9 - Solomon admitted that injustice does indeed occur in government. However, this realization did not lead him to reject the system that God had established.

8.10 - Solomon pointed to the fact that wicked people, who seem so powerful, eventually die and become forgotten. They may seem invincible for a while, but they, too, live within the structure of God's rule. The Lord will execute justice at last.

8.11-13 - Solomon acknowledged that in the short run there are apparent injustices. People do break the rules and seem to get away with it. Nevertheless, no one can sin and ultimately go unpunished.

8.14 - It is reality that life does seem unfair, for just men sometimes are treated badly while wicked people prosper. But the wise person looks beyond present circumstances and sees a sovereign God.

D. Exhortation (8:15)

8.15 - Once again he focused on enjoying life as a gift from God. Even though life is imperfect in this sinful world, he must enjoy what God gives, even when he cannot figure out all that is happening.

Chapter 7: Faith Confronts Futility

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 8:16 – 10:20

Overview

Solomon taught that life is good, even though it contains puzzles. He urged his readers to live wisely and wholeheartedly. He cautioned, however, that wise living is not always appreciated by unbelievers.

Outline

I. Instruction (8:16 – 9:18)

A. Problem (8:16 – 9:6)

1. Frustration (8:16 – 9:1)
2. Fate (9:2, 3)
3. Focus (9:4-6)

B. Advice (9:7-10)

C. Warning (9:11-18)

1. Stay in touch with reality (9:11, 12)
2. The world does not appreciate wisdom (9:13-18)

II. Illustrations (10)

I. Instruction (8:16 – 9:18)

In this section, Solomon summarized what his three previous observations of life had revealed. He restated the crucial problem of life, gave encouraging advice to grasp life, but balanced his challenge with word of caution.

A. Problem (8:16 – 9:6)

1. Frustration (8:16 – 9:1)

Solomon concluded from his attempt to find meaning in life apart from God that no one can fully understand life. At the last, Solomon realized that only God knows and controls life (9:1). He wrote that life is “in the hand of God.”

2. Fate (9:2, 3)

As Solomon viewed life without considering God, it appeared that an impersonal and unjust fate drove all of life. He saw that the one constant was death, for all people die. It does not matter whether a person is righteous or wicked, pure or impure, obedient or disobedient, good or evil, for death claims all.

3. Focus (9:4-6)

In light of the inevitable reality of death, which awaits all people, Solomon focused his attention on life and used a proverb in verse 4 to make his point.

People despised dogs. The lion, on the other hand, symbolized royalty. Solomon said that a living dog is better than a dead lion. In other words, it is better to be alive with all of life's problems than to be the loftiest person who died.

He saw that life is too precious to throw away. It is too short to squander. It is too important to neglect. Life is God's gift to treasure and to invest for eternal dividends.

B. Advice (9:7-10)

9.7 - Solomon stated that since death is just around the corner, enjoy the life that God gives now.

9.8 - He encouraged his readers to enjoy the festive side of life. Life does have its pains, but those pains should blind people to its pleasures to enjoy the good things that God has given.

9.9 - Solomon cited marriage to demonstrate his point. Marriages often start with high values, but eventually pressures of work, finances, children and time can drain a marriage of its strength and joy.

9.10 - Solomon challenged his readers to "go for it." After death there will be no opportunity to use the resources that God has given now. Instead of letting the puzzles of life paralyze him from productive action, he needs to make the most of his strength, health, time and relationships.

C. Warning (9:11-18)

1. Stay in touch with reality (9:11, 12)

While encouraging people to seize life's opportunities, he also cautioned them to keep their feet firmly planted in reality. He taught that natural ability does not guarantee success.

9.11 - Two things are constants for all people – time and chance (happens to both rich/poor).

9.12 – Chance - unforeseen events such as natural disasters, economic downturns, sicknesses and death intrude without warning. We cannot predict when such events will strike us.

2. The world does not always appreciate wisdom (9:13-18)

The second part of Solomon's warning explains that wisdom is not always appreciated in this world.

9.13-15 - Solomon set up a hypothetical situation to make his point. He told of a powerful king who attacked a small village. Although the village was completely out-manned, a poor wise man used his wisdom to deliver the village from defeat. However, the wise man was forgotten by the very people whom he had rescued.

Solomon drew his principles from this story. He concluded in verse 16 that wisdom is better than strength, but it is not always valued by other people.

9.17 - His second principle is that quiet wisdom is better than loud folly. Fools often speak what others want to hear rather than what they need to hear. They may draw a large following with that kind of message. In contrast, true wisdom is the narrow way.

9:18 - Solomon's final principle is that much wisdom is undermined by a small amount of folly. Just as it takes only a little quantity of poison to pollute a large water supply, so a little folly can overturn a large amount of wisdom.

Solomon pointed out that true wisdom is best, but it is often undervalued, overlooked, or rejected. The person who throws himself into life whole-heartedly must not expect applause from the world when he fears God and obeys His word.

II. Illustrations (10)

In chapter 9 Solomon exhorted his readers to live to the fullest extent as wise, God-fearing people, but also to be aware that such wisdom is not readily appreciated in this sinful world. In chapter 10 he reinforced his message with a series of proverbs.

10:1 – In this world, folly is more influential than wisdom, even though it destroys valuable lives.

10:2 – The wise man desires what is honorable and just, but the fool desires what is sinister and evil.

10:3 - The fool demonstrates his folly in his actions and words.

10:4 – Wisdom is sticking to what is right despite pressure.

10:5-7 – Foolish men often rise to places of prominence.

10:8, 9 – Every meaningful action involves an element of risk.

10:10 – Wisdom prepares the wise person for more effective living.

10:11 – Wisdom is beneficial only if it is applied before the problem arises.

10:12, 13 – Wise speech benefits others, but foolish talking is destructive.

10:14 – The fool may talk a lot, but he really does not know the first thing about what will happen.

10:15 – The fool cannot understand the simplest things of life.

10:16-19 – foolish leaders harm many by their incompetence, but a wise leader can benefit others.

10:20 – The wise person is cautious in his criticism.

Solomon knew from his observations that only godly wisdom can open the door to significant life. Yet, the sinful scorn and reject this kind of wisdom.

Chapter 8: Finding the Wise Life

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 11, 12

Overview

Solomon completed his search for significance and meaning in life. After looking “under the sun” at all of the ways in which man tries to find meaning apart from God, he pronounced all of those ways useless. The truly meaningful life is one of reverencing God and of keeping His commandments.

Outline

I. Wisdom and Working (11:1-6)

III. Wisdom and Considering (12:1-8)

II. Wisdom and Rejoicing (11:7-10)

IV. Wisdom and Focusing (12:9-14)

Solomon concluded his discussion about meaningful life. Instead of despairing about life, he ended with a challenge. The wise person should recognize that life is unpredictable; nevertheless, he should throw himself wholeheartedly into life. Solomon encouraged his readers to celebrate life, particularly in view of the fact that death is approaching. Life apart from God is indeed empty, so it is vital to fear God and keep His commandments.

I. Wisdom and Working (11:1-6)

11.1-2 - Solomon spoke of the importance of spreading risk by diversifying one’s efforts. Some people try to avoid the risks of life by taking no chances. However, Solomon would say to them that low risk brings low returns. He used a colorful picture to illustrate his point. Working is like a person’s casting a piece of bread on water. The bread disappears below the surface, but days later it reappears.

Because it is impossible to predict how well one’s efforts will succeed or when misfortune might strike, Solomon wrote that it is best to divide one’s resources among several activities. If a person puts all of his energy, time, money and abilities into one venture and things fall through, he is left with nothing. Therefore the wise course is to prepare for a number of opportunities – side hustles.

11.3 - Solomon cited some general patterns in life. For example, dark storm clouds usually yield rain. However, sometimes even dark clouds may withhold rain as they pass overhead. Similarly, diligence usually leads to success, but prosperity sometimes escapes the most diligent workers.

11.4 - This uncertainty about outcomes could lead to an overly cautious approach to living. The farmer who keeps checking the weather conditions might never find the risk-free time to sow or reap. To wait until life is ideal before acting is foolish, because those “ideal” times are rare.

11.5 - Solomon did not recommend a careless approach to work but, rather, a trusting approach. The puzzle of life is that so many things are either unknown or unknowable to all except the Creator. This weakness demands that we trust God and step into the unknown with full reliance on the Lord.

11.6 - It is impossible to predict which activities will prosper and which ones will fail. Therefore, Solomon recommended that his readers try several options. For example, a farmer cannot tell whether seed sown in the morning will produce better than seed sown in the evening. So, Solomon advised the farmer to sow his seed at both times.

II. Wisdom and Rejoicing (11:7-10)

11.7-8 - Solomon said that knowing that death is approaching, we should take life seriously.

11.9-10 - Solomon urged to focus on the enjoyable aspects of life. He advised that the time to start living is now. Eventually time, possessions and opportunities will end.

Just as it is possible to live only for the pleasures of the moment, so it is possible to be too serious about life and thereby miss the joys that God has for us today.

Christians can anticipate a wonderful future in Heaven; however, that prospect should not negate the joys of life now. Both the present and the future are gifts from God.

III. Wisdom and Considering (12:1-8)

In Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 Solomon described aging and death in beautiful poetic language. His purpose was not to despair of life but to bring life into focus.

12.1 - Solomon began with the challenge in 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Solomon had tried to find fulfillment in life by his own efforts. At last, Solomon concluded that he had wasted many precious years in his search, so he exhorted his reader to turn to God while he was still young.

Because young people may give little thought to the future, Solomon drew a vivid picture of aging in verses 2-5. He made clear that as a person approaches death, his physical capacities and activities decrease, and a sense of loneliness increases.

12.2-3 - The trembling "keepers of the house" probably refer to extremities that grow weaker. The "strong men shall bow themselves" is a picture of weakening legs. The "grinders cease because they are few" is a reference to losing teeth, and the phrase "those that look out of the windows be darkened" is most likely talking about a reduction in vision.

12.4 - The "doors shall be shut in the streets when the sound of the grinding is low" is a picture of lips drawn in against toothless gums, The phrase "and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird" relates the trouble we have sleeping as we age. A loss of hearing is attested in the phrase "all the daughters of musick shall be brought low."

12.5 - The phrases "when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way" relate the fear that keeps older people from wanting to leave the safety of their homes. Graying hair is delicately compared to the flourishing of the almond tree which has white blossoms. The "grasshopper shall be a burden" tells of the absence stamina.

12.6-7 - Ultimately the golden bowl of life will shatter. The body will return to dust, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Thus, human life comes full circle. God created it; humans live it; and then the Creator claims it.

Human life from start to finish is God's gift. God always intended human life to be a blessing. In making man in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 27), God created the potential for man to fellowship with Him. By fashioning a lovely world and giving man intellectual, artistic, and emotional capacities, God enabled man to enjoy fulfillment and satisfaction in fellowship with Him.

12.8 - Solomon echoed the conclusion he reached when observing life apart from God: "All is vanity." When a person does not remember his Creator but tries, instead, to live without God, life is empty and futile. However, Solomon's positive message in Ecclesiastes is that life does not have to be meaningless. Instead of wasting it on meaningless activities and achievements, man should trust God and live to please Him.

IV. Wisdom and Focusing (12:9-14)

12.9 - Solomon reaffirmed his credibility as a teacher of wisdom. His various efforts to find significance and satisfaction apart from God – "under the sun" – may have caused some readers to doubt his reliability. However, Solomon stated that he remained a wise teacher who taught others knowledge. In his search he did not abandon God's wisdom. In fact, Solomon's observations and skills enabled him to write numerous proverbs. In his proverbs, he sought to take what he had seen in life, put it into concise, memorable statement and then use it to teach people God's way.

12.10 – His proverbs are understandable, convicting, and declare truth.

12.11 - These wise words can motivate people to live in God's wise way.

12.12 - Through his efforts in observing life, Solomon learned that there is no end to human ideas. His search for truth had taken him down many road that only led to frustration.

12.13 - At last Solomon gave the crucial truth that he had learned. The whole duty of mankind can be summed up in one command: "Fear God, and keep his commandments".

Meaningful life can be found only in humble, obedient submission to God. Those who seek satisfaction through any other means will be terribly disappointed.

Just as Proverbs says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (9:10), so Solomon's search brought him to this fundamental fact.

12.14 - Solomon ended his challenge with the reminder that God will evaluate all that we do. No person, act, word, or thought will escape His attention.

Solomon learned this: The wise person sees life as a gift from God to be enjoyed.

The End