

Refuge City Church — January 22, 2023
Ecclesiastes — “It’s all vanity!” (Chapter 1)

Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

- **Name:** The book’s name derives from it’s first verse, “The words of the Preacher”; literally, a collection of sentences, leader of the assembly, speaker.
 - Within the name is ‘ecclesia’, where we get our term church/assembly/congregation.
 - In short, this book is a sermon!
- **Author:** If we take verse 1 as fact, we can attribute the author as the son of King David, Solomon.
- **Structure:**
 - Chapter 1:1-11 talk *about* the Preacher.
 - Chapter 1:12-12:8 references “I” language.
 - Chapter 12:9 goes back to talking *about* the Preacher.
- **Date:** If Solomon wrote it himself, it would then have a 10th Century B.C. date.
- **Purpose:**
 - What is the purpose of life? What are we striving for? What brings you satisfaction?
 - The pleasures, wisdom, and philosophy of this world are fleeting [vapors] apart from God.
 - It serves as an “autobiographical” look at a life separated from the Lord; a life lived *without* an eternal perspective.
 - **QUOTE:** “The world cannot satisfy the heart, because the heart is too large for the object...” [J. Vernon McGee]
- **Special Note:**
 - The book has a seemingly negative tone throughout.
 - It serves as a window into self-centeredness, self-indulgence, and the limitations of humanity apart from Christ.
 - Don’t allow yourself to be discouraged. Keep Jesus at the center of it all, and it’ll be clear what we receive from this book of wisdom.

“It’s all vanity!” [Verses 1-2]

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

- “All is vanity.”
 - A vapor [cold breath—here for a moment, gone the next]; unsubstantial, worthless, no enduring value, emptiness.
- Solomon is referring to man’s life—everything that happens in the “dash” between birth and death.

- Some inspirational quotes to get you over the hump of life's worthlessness.
 - "Life is like an onion, you peel layer after layer and you find there's nothing inside. It stinks and makes you cry."
 - "Life is divided into the horrible and the miserable."
 - "Life is like doing laundry. There is a momentary sense of accomplishment, but it all gets dirty again and the cycle starts over."
- There are some that attribute the following words to Steve Jobs, but never substantiated [co-founder of Apple, and accumulated a net worth of \$10 billion].
 - "In other eyes, my life is the essence of success, but aside from work, I have little joy, and in the end wealth is just a fact of life to which I am accustomed. At this moment, lying on the bed, sick and remembering all my life, I realize that all my recognition and wealth that I have is meaningless in the face of imminent death."
- For a deeper view of "vanity", it is more of the limitation to our physical and intellectual ability to grasp all that God is in power and knowledge.
 - **Proverbs 1:7**, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

"What's the point?!" [Verse 3]

"What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"

- Solomon's purpose is not to defy work/labor as a means of provision and purpose.
 - "Gain" = advantage in the end?
 - "Under the sun" = this is all from his earthly perspective.
- In essence: what's the point of all my labor?
 - **Psalm 90:10**, "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."
 - **QUOTE:** "This man had been living through all these experiences under the sun, concerned with nothing above the sun...until there came a moment in which he had seen the whole of life. And there was something over the sun. It is only as a man takes account of that which is over the sun as well as that which is under the sun that things under the sun are seen in their true light." [G. Campbell Morgan]
- Let your work be your worship. Let your passion be your pulpit. Let your labor be love for the Lord.
- Change your perspective on what it is you do.
 - It's not your end, but the means to be the light God has called us to be, and share the Lord with others while we are here.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:58**, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

"The only constant is change." [Verses 4-7]

"A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. 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. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again."

- Nothing is permanent, so live and work with your future hope in mind.
 - Let that motivate you to push ahead, to press on!
- We can view nature with a wondrous spirit, yet when we look at it “under the sun”, nothing really changes.
 - The sun rises and sets. The wind blows where it goes. Water evaporates and falls.
- Yet outside of nature, we have a God who can...
 - Stop the sun, as He did for Joshua [Joshua 10].
 - Controls the wind with the sound of His voice [Psalm 107:29; Luke 8].
 - “Turn on and off” the rain as He chooses [1 Kings 17].
- When we look “above the sun”, we have a Creator God who governs His creation as He chooses... Who places us over His creation... That should cause us to pause and praise!

“Yet it’s all the same.” [Verses 8-11]

“All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 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. Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.”

- There is *nothing* new under the sun.
- Industry and Technological advancements give us the perception of *new*.
 - Yet the reality is that it’s just a different way to accomplish the tasks that have been around from the beginning of time.
 - Maybe we have advanced in the efficiency of how we work, but it’s still labor, no matter how it’s accomplished.
 - Example: Microsoft and Apple revolutionized work and communication, yet its not new... they’re just updated forms of what we’ve been doing all along.
- If we step back and look at it, there is nothing new, and yet we can never find satisfaction or contentment with what we have.
 - We’re constantly looking to ‘upgrade’, hoping it provides us a sense of new accomplishment... only until a newer version is released.
 - It’s the same with TV, movies, and social media... “the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”
- The only one that has the ability to truly create something *new* is the Creator.
 - He gives us *new* life!
 - **2 Corinthians 5:17**, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new* creation. The old has passed away; behold, the *new* has come.”
 - **Romans 6:4**, “...just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in *newness* of life.”

- **Ephesians 4:22-24**, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
- **Revelation 21:5**, “And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

“Chasing after the wind” [Verses 12-18]

“I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 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. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. 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.” 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. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

- Reminder: This is an “under the sun” viewpoint.
- Solomon concludes this portion by giving us some encouragement.
 - All the wisdom, philosophy, psychology, and book-learning will never solve the problems of man!
 - It’s all striving after the wind.
- The problems of this world are not due to a lack of understanding or education, but rather man’s sinful nature!
 - **Genesis 3:17-19**, “And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
- Solomon was not wrong when he said, “It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.”
- We work and strive and labor for the answers to life’s problems, only to come up empty.
 - **Verse 15**: “What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.”
- The more you learn, the more you realize how much you don’t know.
- We think we can bandage our problems with short philosophical tweets, sayings, and even wrap scripture around things to make ourselves feel better.
 - The same person who wrote “**he who increases knowledge increases sorrow**”, also wrote...
 - **Proverbs 2:6-7**, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,”
- True wisdom is found in God and His revealed Word.
- True understanding can only come from the One who created the universe.

- Man's wisdom is folly and crooked.

Conclusion

- When you find yourself wondering why you do the things you do, look to the Lord for His strength to carry on.
- When your job seems cumbersome and you're tired of it, look to the Lord who provides for you from that labor.
- When your days feel like a monotonous cycle of weariness, look 'above the sun' to the One who came to give you life abundantly.
- When you're unsure of the next step, not sure of the direction of your life...
 - **Proverbs 3:5-6**, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."