

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18
Life under the Sun
EC1201

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Ecclesiastes

“LIFE UNDER THE SUN”

INTRODUCTION: Each year I present a *preaching plan* to the Session of the Church...

1. The Elders have the responsibility for “promoting the spiritual interests of the Church and congregation.”
 - a. *Everything* in our church is under the authority and the oversight (management) of our Elders...
 - b. ...and the Deacons who assist them...
 - c. ...including *the pulpit* and the *preaching* of the Word
 - d. *To exercise, in accordance with the Directory for Worship, authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put; to take the oversight of the singing in the public worship of God; to ensure that the Word of God is preached only by such men as are sufficiently qualified to assemble the people for worship when there is no minister; to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the church and congregation;* (Book of Church Order 12-5(e))
2. The *Senior Pastor* is free to preach as God so directs him...
 - a. ...but only in accordance with our church standards
 - i. *The Bible* (supreme standard)
 - ii. *The Westminster Confession of Faith (Catechisms)*
 - iii. *Book of Church Order*
 - b. ...and only in partnership with the Session
 - c. **I am under authority as is anyone in our Church**
3. So, here is how I go about devising a preaching plan:
 - a. I try to generally (not absolutely) follow a *theme* for each year, taken from our Mission Statement, on a four-year rotation.
 - i. *Christ Covenant Church is a reformed congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America committed to making disciples who worship God, grow in community, love others and serve the world.* (Mission Statement)
 - ii. Worship God (worship)
 - iii. Grow in Community (fellowship)
 - iv. Care for others (ministry)
 - v. Serve the World (outreach)
 - b. *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

- c. I try to *assess* where we are as a congregation: our needs, weaknesses, areas of failure, need for instruction, encouragement or reminder.
 - d. I go away for a *week of study*, devoted primarily to the development of a preaching plan.
 - e. I submit *Draft #1* to the *pastors* for their comments and input.
 - f. Then I take this revised plan – *Draft #2* – to the *ELT* for their review and ideas.
 - g. Finally, I submit *Draft #3* to the *Session* for **Final Approval**.
 - h. The *schedule* is then published for the pastors: **This schedule determines what we preach regardless of who preaches.**
 - i. Coordination of messages around a theme
 - ii. Thematic driven rather than topically driven
 - iii. Concentration on books and themes
 - i. As we go through the year, I have the *authority and prerogative* to revise the schedule as I see fit.
 - j. **Christ Covenant's pulpit is really a joint project of the pastors, elders, and deacons of the church.**
4. I had planned, and was approved, to preach a sermon series on “*Our Home in Heaven.*” But as we got into this year, the elders thought it best to replace that series (since we would have just finished *The Book of Revelation*) with a series on **work**.
- a. Obviously not a part of the theme of Worship
 - b. Work is **not** an act of worship any more than hunting, sports or gardening are. (they may be done for God's glory, but they aren't worship)
 - c. *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*
Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)
 - d. As the economy continues to flag and unemployment continues to plague us as a congregation, the elders thought it would be good to hear a sermon series on **work**.
5. **One problem:** *The Bible makes very few references to work and when it does it usually falls under the guise of First Corinthians 10:31...*
So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)
Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)
6. There are relatively few **Christian books** about work, and the ones I looked at, quite honestly, were not worth much:
- a. Simplistic. Trite. More opinion than Scripture.

- b. Often (usually) a writer justifying why it was OK to fixate on our jobs and pursue “careers” as a divine calling.
 - c. Honestly: *Much evangelical theology about work is questionable.*
7. So, I struggled with this question: “Do I construct a topical series about work which would rely heavily upon the opinions of others and my own experiences with work?”
 8. Then I thought about *Ecclesiastes* and Solomon’s repeated emphasis on work in this book of wisdom.
 9. So, here we are: “*Life under the Sun*”: Solomon’s *Book of Ecclesiastes*.
 10. I have come to a serious conclusion about work: **When separated from the spiritual realities of living in God’s world, work becomes either an idol that draws us away from Christ or a cruel taskmaster who drives us to misery and then premature death.**
 11. In a little paperback commentary on *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament scholar, **Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.**, introduces Solomon’s enigmatic book this way...

To the twentieth-century “man in the street,” life is a puzzle. He feels that he, like his culture, has become plastic. For just as plastic now symbolizes the chief achievement of research, technocracy, and massive sales and distribution agencies, so also plastic people feel themselves to be the fruit of sociological research and constant manipulation by economic, political, social, and religious technocracies. Life has lost its zip. There is no joy in Mudville—or anywhere else. Man is made to feel cheap, commercial, dead, and machine-like. The basic worth and dignity of modern man are repeatedly denied when his humanity is deliberately overlooked and he is equated with the brutes and, worse still, with the machine. All the while, everything within that same man cries out for a larger view of the entirety of life. But no, the agony, dread, nothingness, and boredom are worse than anyone had imagined. Truth with a capital T continues to disappear, almost in direct proportion to the disappearance of God from modern thought. “All is relative,” goes the slogan, and that is the only absolute left.

Ecclesiastes is the best news around for such baffled modern men. It is the book for men who want to live again – now. It is the working man’s book: it answers his boredom with the routine of joylessly eating, drinking, and earning a paycheck. Ecclesiastes is also the thinking man’s book. Its author knew that the thinking man is haunted by the questions Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Should I be worldlier than thou or holier than thou? Or is there a third alternative that is simultaneously world accepting and God honoring? Ecclesiastes has as its central concern that basic hunger of men to see if the totality of life fits into a meaningful pattern.

12. So...I want to *introduce* you tonight to Solomon and his **memoirs**: the Old Testament book of *Ecclesiastes*.
 - a. His introduction: *Ecclesiastes 1:1-18*
 - b. His theme: “*Life Under the Sun*”
 - c. His purpose: *A Godly Person at Home in the World and at Work*
13. Let’s jump in!

I. THE PLACE OF ECCLESIASTES IN THE BIBLE

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

*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
 vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
 What does man gain by all the toil
 at which he toils under the sun?
 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.
 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.*

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. (Ecclesiastes 1:1-18)*

2. Ecclesiastes may be the *least preached (taught)* book in the Bible –
 - a. Five tough books to preach...
 - i. *Revelation*: Difficult to interpret
 - ii. *Job*: Unclear message and unanswered questions (long)
 - iii. *Jeremiah*: Long. Negative. “Weeping Prophet”
 - iv. *Proverbs*: Outline: too many unconnected Proverbs
 - v. *Ecclesiastes*: Cynical. Enigmatic. “Godless” message?
 - b. Some men, Old Testament and church history, believed that Ecclesiastes did **not** belong in the Canon of Scripture.
 - c. According to various researchers, the New Testament quotes the Old Testament profusely:
 - i. 695 direct Old Testament quotes
 - ii. References to Old Testament figures, events, ideas over 3,500
 - iii. One estimate: Old Testament referenced, alluded to, quoted 4,105 times in the New Testament
 - iv. Note: Only 4 times does the New Testament quote authors other than the Old Testament
 - v. Of the 26 New Testament books, only 6 do not quote the Old Testament – the 6 shortest of the New Testament: *Titus, Philemon, the 3 Johannine Epistles and Jude* (though Jude refers to Old Testament historical events in Genesis).
 - vi. Five Old Testament books not quoted in the New Testament:
 1. Ezra
 2. Nehemiah
 3. Esther
 4. Song of Solomon
 5. Ecclesiastes
3. My point: *There is no way to call upon the New Testament to help either understand or interpret Ecclesiastes.*
4. Additionally, Ecclesiastes has a message that, at first blush, is quite disturbing to the church.
 - a. **Duane A. Garrett:** *Ecclesiastes: NAC; p. 20.*

Ecclesiastes is often looked upon as the Bible’s resident alien. Other books may be considered perplexing (Job) or as superseded by New Testament revelation (Leviticus). Many read Ecclesiastes, however, with the distinct feeling that this book does not belong in the Bible. What other book immediately meets the reader with such pessimism and despair: “Everything is meaningless” (1:2)? What other book challenges the idea of afterlife (3:19-21)? The poetic power of 3:1-8 is evident to all, but the meaning of the words is far less clear. Furthermore, it is not helpful that almost every aspect of the book’s origin and background is hotly debated.

The authorship, date of composition, purpose, message, and even the original language of the book have all been disputed. In what sense can Ecclesiastes be called a Word of God?

- b. **Tremper Longman:** *Ecclesiastes: NICOT*; p. 26.

The book was accused of contradictions, secularity, and even outright heresy. Indeed, all three accusations were interrelated in that Ecclesiastes was said not only to contradict itself, but also to contradict other Scriptures, which meant that its author was a heretic.

- c. An enigmatic, complex, and brutally frank book

- d. **The most realistic book in the Bible**

- e. **Derek Tidball:** *That's Just the Way It Is: A Realistic View of Life from the Book of Ecclesiastes*. (p. 3).

Francis Schaeffer once wrote, 'There is a time, and ours is such a time, when a negative message is needed before anything positive can begin...people often say to me, "What would you do if you met a really modern man on a train and you had just an hour to talk to him about the Gospel?" I would spend forty-five minutes on the negative, to show him his real dilemma—to show him that he is more dead than even he thinks he is...then I would take ten or fifteen minutes to tell him the Gospel... unless he understands what is wrong, he will not be ready to listen to, and understand, the positive.' The author of Ecclesiastes would have applauded Schaeffer's approach, assuming, that is, that he adopts his negative perspective as a technique rather than as a genuine expression of his own despair. Either way, the Preacher, as we shall call the author, drags us through the pointlessness and stupidity of life, often with great humour. Only very occasionally does he give us a glimpse of light. But in writing as he does, he sets down what we all feel and touches many of our raw nerves. It is a book which speaks for and to our generation, as it has often done before.

- f. **A negative book with a most positive message!**

5. **Key point:** One of the ways I find the purpose and meaning of a book of the Bible is to discover how the church has used and understood that book over the ages.

- a. The *illumination* of the Holy Spirit over time
- b. The *wisdom of the elders* who have gone before us
- c. The *place* of the Biblical book in the history of the church

6. Ecclesiastes was placed into a specific section of the Hebrew Old Testament –

- a. Three main sections: *law, prophets, sacred writings*
 - i. *Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44)
 - ii. *Law...Prophets...Psalms* (chief book of the sacred writings)
 - iii. *Hagiographa*: Holy/sacred writings comprised of 3 sections and 12 books
 - *Book of Truth*: Psalms, Job, Proverbs

- *Megilloth*: “Big Scroll” (five books): *Song of Solomon*, *Ruth*, *Esther*, *Lamentations*, *Ecclesiastes*,
 - *Sacred writings*: Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (one book), Chronicles (one book)
- iv. ...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)
- b. The *Megilloth* was used in Jewish liturgy of 5 great feasts of the Levitical Calendar.
- c. **R. K. Harrison**: *Introduction: To the Old Testament*; p. 1049.
- The Song of Solomon is the first of the five Megilloth, the five scrolls read by the Jews at various feasts: Canticles (Passover), Ruth (Pentecost), Ecclesiastes (Tabernacles), Esther (Purim), and Lamentations (anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem).*
- d. Ecclesiastes was read at *Tabernacles (Booths/Succoth)* – the commemoration of living in temporary shelters in the wilderness for 40 years and receiving provision and protection from God.
- e. *These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.*
- And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet. You have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 29:1-6)*
7. **Eugene Peterson** calls the five books of the *Megilloth*...
- a. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*
 - b. *Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:40)*
 - c. Five little books to destroy spiritual giants of evil
 - i. *Song of Solomon*: prayer directing
 - ii. *Ruth*: story making (telling)
 - iii. *Lamentations*: pain sharing
 - iv. *Esther*: community building
 - v. *Ecclesiastes*: nay saying!
 - d. **Eugene Peterson**: *Five Smooth Stones*; pp. 152-153.

A cursory sorting out of people's expectations (at least the kind that get channeled through the conduit of the pastoral vocation) ends up with two piles, miracles and answers. When pastors look around at what their competitors are offering, most of it is classifiable, also, in terms of miracles and answers. In a supply-demand marketplace there is, I suppose, a certain inevitability in this correlation between what is wanted and what is offered. At this point pastoral work encounters a complex difficulty, for the vocation of pastor does not permit trafficking in either miracles or answers. Pastors are in the awkward position of refusing to give what a great many people assume it is our assigned job to give. We are in the embarrassing position of disappointing people in what they think they have a perfect right to get from us. We are asked to pray for an appropriate miracle; we are called upon to declare an authoritative answer. But our calling equips us for neither. In fact, it forbids us to engage in either the miracle business or the answer business. Caught in this crossfire of religious expectations, the pastor finds the book of Ecclesiastes a most welcome ally, for it represents a pastoral position worked out vis-à-vis miracle-mongers and answer-makers. It does not direct pastors in what to do, but it is of immense help in telling us what we need not do – in fact, must not do.

8. **Nay saying** is a large part of my job – especially in our modern, materialistic, me-centered American culture –
 - a. **No!** Wealth will not make you happy!
 - b. **No!** The loss of your job is not the worst thing that could happen to you! There are worse!
 - c. **No!** Downsizing or even losing your home does not mean failure and ruin! This could be a blessing!
 - d. **No!** A rewarding career is not the guarantee of fulfillment.
 - e. **No!** You can't have it all – career, travel, 3 children, big house, hot car, hot body, freedom and friends, and independence ! Women (and men too!) must make choices.
 - f. **No!** All the promises of the world are false: success, sex, love, family, education, career, wealth and wisdom. None of them will give your soul joy. Only God can do that.
 - g. **And all this nay-saying from a man who had it all...Solomon!**

II. THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

1. There are literary, structural and vocabulary reasons that cause many scholars to believe that an *anonymous* person wrote Ecclesiastes – even assuming the identity of Solomon.
2. But verse 12 seems to clearly point to *Solomon* as the author.
 - a. *I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.* (Ecclesiastes 1:12)
 - b. This was the view of the Jewish *Targum*
 - c. This was the view of the *early church*
 - d. Uncertain? Perhaps. *But I will stick with the view that King Solomon, the son of David, wrote Ecclesiastes.*

3. When? As an old man, near the end of his life and his reign...
 - a. Hence the past tense: “*I, the preacher, have been King over Israel in Jerusalem*” (i.e., for 40 years)
 - b. Hebrew: *qoheleth*: one who calls the assembly together –
 - i. A “preacher”
 - ii. Or a king, president, premier, presiding officer
 - c. *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.* (Ecclesiastes 1:1)
 - d. I have no reason to doubt this verse: David had *19 sons* in all by his 8 wives, plus the sons of his concubines, plus at least one daughter, *Tamar*, but surely more.
 - e. But only *Solomon* became the king in Jerusalem, the king over Israel (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12).
4. What is Solomon’s **theme** in this book of Ecclesiastes?
 - a. We will find that answer in *four* repeated words and phrases –
 - b. *Vanity* (the Hebrew word *hebel*) – what is visible or recognizable, but unsustainable, unsubstantial, fleeting, profitless and empty.
 - i. *Vanity of vanities* – a repeated refrain
 - ii. Solomon used *vanity* 23 times in Ecclesiastes.
 - c. *Striving after wind*: going after that which cannot be grasped and is without substance. (11 times)
 - d. *Under the sun*: Solomon’s reference point from his perspective (**29 times!**)
 - e. Solomon’s celebration of **work** as a good thing, a source of joy and blessing, and a gift from God.
 - i. *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.* (Ecclesiastes 2:24)
 - ii. *I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.* (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)
 - iii. *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?* (Ecclesiastes 3:22)
 - iv. *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. 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.* (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19)
 - v. *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.*

Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

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. 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.
(Ecclesiastes 9:7-10)

5. Ecclesiastes sounds *negative*, but it is not. It is *realistic*.
6. If we put these four repetitious words, phrases and statements together here is the overall **theme** and the major **message** of Solomon's *Ecclesiastes*: *"Enjoy your calling from God and the work of your life, but be careful not to view work and wealth merely from the human perspective 'under the sun'. If you make that mistake, all will end up in 'vanity' (emptiness). And you will find yourself 'striving after wind' all your life only to end up, in old age, with a handful of nothing and a heart full of regret."*
7. What millions of Baby Boomers and Baby Busters are experiencing today: *a wasted life spent in chasing the wind!*
8. **Walter Kaiser**: *Ecclesiastes: Total Life: EBC; pp. 16-17.*

Qoheleth was working on the problem of man's attempt to find meaning in all aspects of God's good world without coming to know the world's Creator, Sustainer and final Judge. For central to all of man's concerns is this problem of integrating life and truth. The issue appears to have come to a head in 3:11: God has made everything beautiful in its time; He has also put eternity [ôlām] into man's heart so that he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end. And there the issue hangs. Man has a capacity and desire to know how all things, men, and ideas fit together – the end from the beginning – and yet he cannot know until he comes to know the One who built man in His own image with the capacity to understand who he is as a man, what he means, and what is the worth of things, even life itself. Life, in and of itself, even God's good world with all its good, God-given gifts, is unable to deliver meaning and joy when it is appropriated in a piecemeal fashion. This, as will be argued later on, is the meaning of the prologue: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity": namely, that no single part of God's good world can unlock the meaning of life. Life, in and of itself, is unable to supply the key to the questions of identity, meaning, purpose, value, enjoyment, and destiny. Only in coming to know God can one begin to find answers to these questions.

9. There is a grand **purpose** to Solomon's writing...

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

1. In his opening comments (his introduction), Solomon tells us two things...
2. **First**: There is a futility, a frustration, and a restless discontent to any life focused merely on life *under the sun*.
 - a. *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*
Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?

*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.
 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. (Ecc. 1:1-11)*

- b. Life does **not** "fit together" without a divine center to give it meaning and purpose.
 - c. Things in creation will **not** satisfy if the creature's delight is in the created thing and not the Creator.
 - d. Events will **not** have meaning, but will appear random, routine and even relentless if God's plan does not order life.
 - e. **God cannot be added to one's life. He must BE one's life or life gets ugly and unfulfilling.**
 - f. *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)*
...yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (John 5:40)
3. **Second:** No pursuit of happiness will turn out well if we do not pursue God and see happiness not as the end of life but a by-product of knowing God.
4. Solomon tells us **Five Painful Lessons** he's learned in life:
- a. *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. (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)*

- b. **First:** Without God life turns out to be "*an unhappy business.*"

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. (Ecclesiastes 1:12-13)

- c. **Second:** Without God all in life, *under the sun*, will end up being an empty endeavor: *vanity and striving after wind.*

I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

- d. **Third:** Without God nothing broken or bent in your life can really be fixed or permanently remedied.

*What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted. (Ecclesiastes 1:15)*

- e. **Fourth:** Without God even *good things...spiritual things* will turn sour, disappoint and end up empty!

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. (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17)

- f. **Fifth:** Without God even the best of intentions and the most noble of efforts will end in "*vexation*"

i. i.e., increased grief of soul

ii. more sadness and disappointment, not less

iii. *For in much wisdom is much vexation,*

and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

5. **Michael A. Eaton:** *Ecclesiastes: TOTC: p. 45.*

The Preacher's point is that what is to be seen with sheer pessimism 'under the sun' may be seen differently in the light of faith in the generosity of God: mankind gains nothing 'under the sun'; the 'earth' which is dominated by futility 'goes on for ever'; no new thing can take place 'under the sun'.

As for the scope of the Preacher's researches, he sought out what was done 'under heaven' and evaluated what resources could be found 'under the sun'. His quest for pleasure likewise found no hope of gain 'under the sun'; what is done 'under the sun' was grievous to him. For much of the time the argument leaves God out of account. Then dramatically the Preacher introduces God and all changes. The 'under the sun' terminology falls into the background or lapses altogether; instead he refers to the 'hand of God', the joy of man, and the generosity of God. Ecclesiastes is thus an exploration of the barrenness of life without a practical faith in God.

6. Ecclesiastes is difficult to read, preach, listen to because of the structure of the book –
 - a. *Introduction* (1:1-18)
 - b. *Body of the book* (2:1-11:10) – an exposé on why life under the sun is meaningless with a God-centered reference.
 - c. *Conclusion* (12:1-8)
 - d. *Epilogue* (12:9-14)
7. So...you have to wade through 11 chapters of *negativity* before you get to the **positive conclusion**.
8. I will **not** do that: Subject you to 17 painful weeks of nay-saying before I introduce God into the story!
9. **But...we do** want to look at work, careers, education, health, wealth, romance, sex, marriage, family success, possessions, fame, reputation, children, retirement, inheritance, death and what happens after we are gone from two perspectives.
 - a. ***Life under the sun*** (guaranteed to disappoint)
 - b. ***Life with God*** (promising to fulfill)
10. **Know this:** Ecclesiastes is **not** a book about avoiding *tragedy*, but rather about escaping *triviality*... meaninglessness... emptiness...vanity...wind...a “blah” life without joy.
11. **Derek Kidner:** *Ecclesiastes: BST* – “*A Time to Mourn and A Time to Dance*; p. 20.

Triviality is more stifling than tragedy, and the shrug is the most hopeless of all comments on life. The function of Ecclesiastes is to bring us to the point where we begin to fear that such a comment is the only honest one. So it is, if everything is dying. We face the appalling inference that nothing has meaning, nothing matters under the sun. It is then that we can hear, as the good news which it is, that everything matters – ‘for God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.’ That is how the book will end. On this rock we can be destroyed: but it is rock, not quicksand. There is the chance to build.

CONCLUSION: We are living in times of great change, great “chance,” and great chaos...

1. There is a change in the economic, political, and military balance in the world: “Gzero” they are now calling it.
2. The economy is in a major funk – a recession that *really* is a depression: world-wide, long-lasting, across the economy, systemic.

3. A “king” in the White House who seems unable or unwilling to lead us forward into prosperity. And an opponent about whom few would say “I’m excited.”
4. Job losses, lost boys at home, graduates unable to find jobs, massive debt (homes, cars, college loans, credit cards, medical bills), aging parents, shrinking portfolios, vanishing retirement, huge deficits, shaky Social Security & Medicare, lost equity and disrupted families.
5. Marriage is being redefined, gender is confused, marriages are being dissolved, sex is rampant, the internet rules all, and the rising generation seems to resent anything mom and dad ever did.
6. Three emotions triangulate the American heart: *Pessimism (hopelessness), anger, and fear.*
7. Americans are awash in a sea of *unfilled dreams, unmet entitlements and unrealized promises. We are “raw” in soul.*
8. And the flame that boils this ugly pot of sickening stew is the question: *What is all this about? Does life have a grand purpose, a great design and a good end?*
9. Solomon says, “Absolutely...if you can see beyond the sun!”
10. Back on March 12, 1965, when I was only 15 years old and a sophomore in high school, a young troubadour released a golden record in London, England.
 - a. His name was **Donovan Philips Leitch**, from Scotland.
 - b. The world knew him simply as “**Donovan.**”
 - c. His song: *Try and Catch the Wind*
 - d. Obviously, he wrote this about a boy and a girl. The boy loves the girl but he can’t catch her heart in return.
 - e. Donovan got his refrain from the book of Ecclesiastes: “*catch the wind*”
 - f. The words could well apply to you (and me) and God...

*In the chilly hours and minutes of uncertainty I want to be
 I long to be in the warm hold of your mind
 To feel you all around me and to take your hand across the sand
 Ah but I may as well try and catch the wind*

*When sundown pales the sky I want to hide a while behind your smile
 And everywhere I'd look your eyes I'd find
 For me to love you now would be the sweetest thing t'would make me sing
 Ah but I may as well try and catch the wind*

*When rain has covered leaves with tears
 I want you near to kill my fears
 To help me leave all my blues behind
 Standing in your heart is where I want to be and long to be
 Ah but I may as well try and catch the wind*

11. Solomon (and I) have some good news for you. God is not the wind. He wants us to “catch” Him...find Him...lay hold of Him...love Him...be happy in Him...

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

12. And **that** is what Solomon wants to tell us about our work, our life, our God – *we can catch God’s blessing!*