

"Don't Lose Your Way"

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Good Morning Beloved,

- We are starting a new series today through the book of Ecclesiastes.
 - It is a fun pairing with the book of Galatians, which we just concluded.
 - Galatians says.... Here is how you are saved.
 - Ecclesiastes says... Here is how you are NOT saved.
 - If you live life apart from God... you will lose your way.
 - Christian Ginsurg – "... the design of this book... shows... the utter insufficiency of all human efforts to obtain real happiness, which cannot be secured by wisdom, pleasure, industry, wealth... but consists in the calm enjoyment of life, in the resignations to the dealings of Providence, in the service of God, and in the belief in a future state of retribution, when all the mysteries in the present course of the world shall be solved."
- To say it another way...
 - At a graduation speech the speaker asked... Will achievement satisfy your soul?
 - Ants climbing a hill...
 - One ant reaches the top and says to the one behind him... "there is nothing up here."
 - The other ant replies... "Silence, you fool. We are where they want to be."
 - Point: Beware seeking fatal successes.¹
- If we never lift our eyes from the horizon of ourselves... there is one conclusion...
 - Nothing matters.
- But when we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ... there is only one conclusion...
 - Everything matters.

Reading of God's Word

¹ Dane Ortlund in his sermon on this passage drew on what Steve Jobs wrote at the end of his life, "I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. In others' eyes, my life is the epitome of success. However, aside from work, I have little joy. In the end, my wealth is only a fact of life that I am accustomed to. At this moment, lying on my bed and recalling my life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in have paled and become meaningless in the face of my death.

You can employ someone to drive the car for you, make money for you, but you cannot have someone bear your sickness for you. Material things lost can be found or replaced. But there is one thing that can never be found when it's lost—Life. Whichever stage in life you're in right now, with time, you will face the day when the curtain falls. Treasure love for your family, love for your spouse, love for your friends. Treat yourself well and cherish others. As we grow older, and hopefully wiser, we realize that a \$3000 or a \$30 watch both tell the same time. You will realize that your true inner happiness does not come from the material things of this world. Whether you fly first class or economy, if the plane goes down—you go down with it."

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

*2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

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

*4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.*

*5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.*

*6 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.*

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

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

*9 What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.*

*10 Is there a thing of which it is said,
“See, this is new”?*

*It has been already
in the ages before us.*

*11 There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after.*

Preaching God's Word

1. Nothing Matters²

- a. *1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*
 - i. Solomon... the son of David... is the preacher to the congregation.³
 - 1. In some ways... this is almost like an autobiographical account of wisdom....
 - a. “This is my story, I who on the day when God Almighty in that awful way came down and filled his temple, stood before his people, amid the fire and smoke, and wore the robes of Worship Leader. I was king, the son of David, ruling everything and everyone in Jerusalem, that great and glorious city: Here what I relate.”⁴
 - ii. He has an amazing beginning and a brutal end.
 - 1. God appears to him (1 Kings 3 – the prayer for wisdom)... twice (1 Kings 9 – the warning from idolatry!)
 - a. Yet we read...
 - i. 1 Kings 11:4 - *4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.*
 - iii. What is the only correct view of life when your heart is not true to the LORD God?
- b. *2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*
 - i. Everything is a soap bubble....
 - 1. Some people have the little sticks that blow bubbles.... Maybe the size of a quarter.
 - 2. Others have the small swimming pools with the rope that they wave.... Maybe the size of a sleeping bag.
 - 3. Others have the battery generated gizmos that blow bubbles all over the patio...
 - a. Point... the things people try to get to add “value” to their lives...⁵
 - i. Every effort (1:14; 2:11, 17, 19)
 - ii. Any fruit of our labors (2:5, 21, 26)
 - iii. Pleasure (2:1)

² Gordon Keddie – “He means to expose what we nowadays call the secular view of life: a life without any absolutes, a life without the certainties of the revelation of God's Word, a life lived out of values generated by man without reference to God, a life that expects lasting satisfaction from earthbound things. Qoheleth wants to show how such a life has to be meaningless and must end in disillusionment in time, not to mention eternity. To heighten the drama of his argument, he gives vivid presentation of this position as if it is all there is!”

³ The Hebrew word translated “Preacher” is the word “Qoheleth”. The Greek translation of that Hebrew word is “Ecclesiastes”. So “Ecclesiastes” means... sage, assembler, teacher, preacher, or something like a gatherer of wisdom.

⁴ Moore, T. M. Ecclesiastes: Ancient Wisdom When All Else Fails : A New Translation & Interpretive Paraphrase. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 17.

⁵ O'Donnell, D. S. (2014). Ecclesiastes. P & R Publishing, 8.

6 *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.*

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

i. I was born in Dyersburg, Tennessee which is 13 miles from the Mississippi River.

1. According to the National Park Service.... “The Mississippi River discharges an average of close to 600,000 cubic feet (17,000 m³) of water per second into the Gulf of Mexico. This massive volume equates to roughly 4.5 million gallons (approx. 17 million liters) of water pouring into the Gulf every single second.”⁹

a. Yet never has the Gulf cried out... “we’re full”...

i. nor Mobile answered... “we’re fine here... stop flowing...”

ii. The Sun... the wind... the streams... shows how life is so... repetitive.

1. Any yet... man is not content...

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

i. The best word in advertising is still the same... “new”.

1. We are like the insatiable sea... or the Gulf of Mexico... human eyes and ears never reach a point of complete satisfaction.¹⁰

g. 9 *What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.*

10 *Is there a thing of which it is said,
“See, this is new”?*

*It has been already
in the ages before us.*

11 *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. POINT: It is forcing us to ask a great question....

1. Gibson... “if we won’t live forever, or even long enough to make a lasting difference to the world, how then should we live?”

⁹ <https://www.nps.gov/miss/riverfacts.htm>

¹⁰ Gibson, David. *Living Life Backward : How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017.

- a. Solomon is saying... almost everyone is pretending to have a good answer and they don't.¹¹
- b. Transition: Life under the sun... life lived apart from God and under the curse (Gen. 3) is toil... repetition... and vanity.
 - i. If you try to find meaning in this life apart from God... you will lose your way....
 - 1. And conclude nothing matters.
 - i. But there is another conclusion....

2. Everything Matters

- a. Ecclesiastes will wrestle with the big questions in life...
 - i. Squarely facing that...
 - 1. Man is not in control...
 - 2. Man is wicked...
 - 3. And death comes for every man.
- b. The Word of God will say...¹²
 - i. Be unparalyzed by life's uncertainties, enjoy life as God's gift ((11:1-6).
 - ii. Be undepressed by life's shortness enjoy life as God's gift (11:9-10).
 - iii. So reverence to and serve God in life, enjoy life as God's gift (12:1-14).
 - 1. This is the way to live well.
- c. Question: But how do you know that it isn't just more "bubbles"... vanity of vanity?
 - i. Because that word shows up again in the Bible.
 - 1. Romans 8:18ff - ¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*
 - ii. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only place for you to escape the futility of vanity described by the preacher in Ecclesiastes.
 - 1. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead... there is now a present hope that drives out despair.
 - a. Creation used to be an echo of our unfulfilled longings (the sun... the sea... the wind)... now it is like the prelude to the grand chorus of redemption throughout the new heavens and the new earth.

¹¹ Gibson says... "Let's pretend that if we get the promotion, or see our church grow, or bring up good children, we'll feel significant and leave a lasting legacy behind us. Let's pretend that if we change jobs, or emigrate to the sun, we won't experience the humdrum tedium and ordinariness of life. Let's pretend that if we move to a new house, we'll be happier and will never want to move again. Let's pretend that if we end one relationship and start a new one, we won't ever feel trapped. Let's pretend that if we were married, or weren't married, we would be content. Let's pretend that if we had more money, we would be satisfied. Let's pretend that if we get through this week's pile of washing and dirty diapers and shopping lists and school runs and busy evenings, next week will be quieter. Let's pretend that time is always on our side to do the things we want to do and become the people we want to be. Let's pretend we can break the cycle of repetition and finally arrive in a world free from weariness."

¹² Barrick, 24.

- iii. For the glorious freedom that Christ has purchased for believers strengthens them to do something truly remarkable....
 - 1. Serve the One whose name is eternal.
 - a. So everything matters...
 - i. Because by faith in the one who rescued us when we had lost our way...
 - 1. Now...
 - a. Col. 3:17 - *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Benediction

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

¹⁶Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.