



Ecclesiastes: God of Every Season

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 3:1 & 11 "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:" "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

Background

Ecclesiastes is the 21st book of the Bible and the fourth book of poetry in the Old Testament. The Hebrew title of the book is *Qoheleth* which is translated as "preacher" and comes from the word *qahal* which means "to assemble." Thus, the title of Ecclesiastes means "one who addresses an assembly, a preacher." While the author's name is not directly stated, references to the writer as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1), one who has gained great wisdom (1:16), and collector of proverbs (12:9) supports the traditional viewpoint that Solomon authored Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes was probably written late in Solomon's life around 935 BC shortly before his death in 931 BC. Ecclesiastes has the tone of somebody looking back on his many experiences in life and finding little meaning or satisfaction with the things of this life. Solomon certainly had the wealth and opportunity to pursue many different things and experiences in life. In his later years, the glory found early in his reign had begun to fade as his hundreds of wives led him to stray from God. At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes that life lived apart from God is meaningless and he directs the reader to fear God and pursue a life lived in service to Him.

The Short Story

A life lived without a relationship with God is empty and unsatisfying.

What's the Big Idea?

Ecclesiastes is a book that shows an intense search by the author to find meaning in life. Solomon begins the book by declaring that "all is vanity" (1:2), the meaninglessness and futility of life as he saw it. Solomon had wealth, honor, power, prestige, and lived in luxury, yet he found that the satisfaction and fulfillment these things brought was fleeting, leaving him with an emptiness inside. Solomon continues his dissertation by describing how life "under the sun" is filled with injustice, uncertainties, changes in fortune, and inequity. In his search for meaning in life, Solomon acknowledges that God is constant and refers to Him throughout Ecclesiastes. God provides food, drink, and work for people to partake of (2:24) and He empowers people to enjoy His provision in their life (5:18-20). Solomon also declares that God has "set eternity in the human heart" (3:11). Solomon discovers that only when humans look "above the sun" with an eternal and divine perspective, will they see that life is a gift from God and purpose, meaning, and joy are found when lived in a relationship with Him. Therefore, Solomon urges his readers to "fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Humans were created to be in a relationship with God. This is clearly seen in Ecclesiastes. God has "set eternity in the human heart" (3:11). Humans long for meaning and value and something of eternal significance. Only God can fill this longing. We may try to find fulfillment through our job, family, intellect, wealth, or our accomplishments, but apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ, the satisfaction found in the things of this world is temporary. Only Christ can provide the eternal joy and satisfaction that we desire. Christ is the "one Shepherd" (12:11) who has come to give us eternal and abundant life (John 10:10). When we live in relationship with Jesus Christ, we live with a God-focused viewpoint of life on earth. We see that life and all of its many blessings are a gift from God. We also see that no matter what season we are in, God is with us. God is present in the good times and in the hard times; in the joyous times and in the sad times. God is constant and we can trust Him. Solomon learned that life lived "under the sun" is vanity, but life lived "under the Son" brings true joy, purpose, and fulfillment.

Teaching Text

Eccl 3:9-14 "What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him."

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Summarize Solomon's outlook on life captured in the book of Ecclesiastes.
- What was the history and background of Solomon and it's importance to understanding this book?
- What does the changing of the seasons of life tell us about God and about us?
- What does Solomon say is man's response to God's sovereignty and our futility?
- What were we created to do? How does this burden us? What is our response in this present life?

Practical Application

- Read 3:1-8. What seasons of life have you faced? Have you seen both sides of each coin?
- Look at the evidence of your actions and strivings. Where are you drawing meaning from?
- What is your response to the dilemma of desiring eternity but not being able to attain it?
- What do you "toil" with every day? How can you find satisfaction in it? What is the key to doing so?
- How can you respond to the Lord today? What is His calling on your life in this current season?

Hitting the Highpoints

- Eccl 1:3 — "What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?"
- Eccl 2:11 — "But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish...."
- Eccl 3:1-11 — "For everything there is a season a time for every activity under heaven."
- Eccl 12:1 — "Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator."
- Eccl 12:13-14 — "Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands..."

Bonus Features

Where is Jesus in the Book of Ecclesiastes? The nature of man remains unchanged from the time of Ecclesiastes to this very day. Men and women are in constant search of purpose and fulfillment, and as did Solomon, will try most any endeavor to find it. The bible teaches and we know from life experience that true purpose and fulfillment will not found outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastes points us to Him.

Personal Takeaways and Notes