

Ecclesiastes

Key Words/Phrases

Sermon Outline:

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3; 12:8

Ecclesiastes means “one who convenes an assembly” (ekklesia)
- Hebrew word is “Qoheleth”(ko-hell-et) meaning Teacher or Preacher

Author: Traditionally Solomon (v.1 and v.12)

- 1 Kings 2-11

Some scholars suggest a “Royal Official Autobiography”

- 2 voices - One of the Author (1:1-11/12:9-13)
- One of the Preacher (1:12-12:8)

Either way, it is the life of Solomon

Wisdom Literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

- Proverbs = Godly Wisdom = Wisdom from above = Positive instruction
 - Proverbs not promises
 - Typically, this is how it should work out
- Ecclesiastes = Wisdom from an earthly point of view
 - Negative instruction
 - What would life look like if we remove God from the equation
 - OT form of apologetics
- Both are seeking to inform the reader in how we are to live our life

Key words/phrases

1. Hevel
2. “Under the sun”
3. “Striving after the wind”
4. Gift

This morning, I want to provide a framework of this book by trying to let these key words paint the purpose for us. And then present what I believe our goal should be at the end of this book. I hope you brought your Bibles.

1. Hevel (nearly 40 times)

- literally means “vapor” or “smoke”
- It is used as a metaphor or imagery
- Something that looks as if you can take hold of it but it is impossible, especially with the wind blowing (1:2-3) (2:1)
- He will use it in areas where man tries to find 3 main things:
 - Purpose — Why am I here?
 - Satisfaction — How do I enjoy life?
 - Understanding — Is there really any meaning?
 - He will go on a quest through wisdom, work, pleasure, living wise, riches, sex, marriage, kids, etc.
 - Each time he will arrive at “hevel”
- It implies the transient, brevity, vulnerability of life (7:15; 9:9)
 - It's here then it is not

- James 4:13— “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”
- Abel = hevel — He was here then he wasn’t (6 verses)
- It also implies frustrating, perplexing, fleeting, enigma (8:14)
 - It doesn’t make sense
 - We can’t understand it or control it
- But also implies meaningless/nothingness/futility
 - Not meaning in essence
 - But meaningless in the sense of seeking it find the 3 things we all our looking for
 - It fails to provide meaningful-lasting purpose, satisfying, and understanding.

2. “Under the Sun” (25 +times)

- “nothing new under the sun”
- Man’s point of view
- Where proverbs would be heavenly perspective, Ecclesiastes is earthly
- Some see it as an OT apologetics book
- If we were to remove God from the equation, where is purpose, satisfaction, and meaning found? And is it lasting and meaningful?
- 1:13- “all that is done under heaven”
- He begins to wrestle with the tension of when Proverbs and the reality of life under the sun conflict.
- Refers to the present age = realm of “level”
- It’s the Earth under the curse of sin
- There are 3 illusions from “life under the sun”
 - If I work hard, do right, save money, and treat people fairly, then things will always go well for me.
 - That we are in control of our lives
 - That our minds can grasp all things
 - If I do things God’s way, then I can avoid the “hevel” of life
 - This is exemplified when things don’t go our way and we get mad at God
 - “Hevel” isn’t God’s fault, it’s our fault
- Why is life “under the sun” this way?
- Genesis 3= the curse
 - Satan - child birth- tension between man/woman- the ground is cursed- thorns/thistles will grow to make eating/working difficult— death
- **Romans 8:20— “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it”**

3. “Striving after the wind”

- uses this many times following the “hevel” journey
- “Nailing jelly to a wall”, “trying to push a rope”, “like beating a dead horse”, “catch a cloud”, “building a castle of air”, “getting blood out of a stone”, “getting a square peg through round hole”, “chasing your own tail”, “like pouring water in a sieve”
- Striving = chasing or shepherding
- Shepherding sheep and people is had enough, imagine trying to fence in, catch, stop, chase the wind
- It’s the essence of a futile endeavor to find purpose, satisfaction, and meaning
- But it’s an incredibly accurate picture of us trying to grasp at things.
 - “If I can just catch this thing, then I can control and make sense of it
 - Wisdom, pleasure, success, etc.
 - We find ourselves exhausted and frustrated, looking around the corner for the next thing and it’s a never ending/satisfying endeavor

4. Gift - introduces the counter of “under the Earth”

- 5:2— “For God is in heaven, and you are on earth”
- 2:24-26- From the hand of God
- Acts 17:26-27— **And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him**
- 3:9-13
 - This searching/seeking is from God
 - But no matter what we cannot arrive at is SO
 - Be joyful and do good/eat and drink for this is the gift from God
- 3:22- rejoice in his work, for that is his lot (gift)
 - Here’s the reason: how can we know for sure what happens after we’re gone?
- 5:15-20— “accept”
 - The one who can find enjoyment in his lot, doesn’t spin his wheels in the hevel
- 8:12&15
- 9:7-10
- 11:7-12:1
- The gift introduces a new perspective
- Is an either/or or a both?
- Can we embrace the hevel and find deep joy in the present?
- Learn to see “hevel” not as an obstacle to joy/satisfaction, but an opportunity.
- The sit back and realize we can’t take hold of nor control anything.

Thesis and goal:

For the believer: That we would loosen are futile grip on things under the sun, and cling to the One who sits above and rules over the sun.

- we will realize that we can have a grip on things under the sun anyway
- we also realize we can cling to Him, because He’s taken a hold of us

For the unbeliever: To see the inability of anything outside of Christ to supply lasting purpose, satisfaction, and understanding.

The hope is that we feel the “hevel”. Not ignore it but feel it.

- we embrace it
- Look forward to the day when there is no more “hevel”

Romans 8:18-30

1 Peter 1:13-21

Small Group Discussion:

1. How did the Holy Spirit speak to you through the Scripture and sermon Sunday? What stood out to you? What questions do you have?
2. “Hevel” is repeated nearly 40 times in Ecclesiastes and conveys the idea of life being fleeting, frustrating, and sometimes seemingly meaningless. In what areas of your life have you felt the “hevel” most intensely— trying to grasp purpose, satisfaction, and understanding? How do you respond in those moments?
3. Ecclesiastes ask: “What if we remove God from the equation?” When you reflect on life “under the sun,” what are some modern illusions or lies that promise meaning or control, but leave us empty?
4. The Preacher explores many paths and finds them all to be like “striving after the wind.” Why do you think we often keep chasing the same things, even when they fail to fulfill us? What might it look like to stop “chasing after the wind” and cling to Christ for fulfillment?
5. The idea of life as a gift from God is offered as a counter to the futility of “life under the sun.” What does it practically look like to enjoy God’s gifts— work, relationships, food, time — as gifts rather than as things to control or master?
6. The sermon presented this goal: “Loosen our grip on things under the sun, and cling to the One who sits above and reigns over the sun.” What’s is one specific thing in your life you’re gripping too tightly right now— and how might trusting God help loosen that grip?