

WISDOM FROM ECCLESIASTES

It's all a matter of perspective (world views)

Intro: Tonight my sermon is really a sermon about a sermon, a very old sermon. Yet, this ancient sermon has a very up-to-date message—up-to-date because it relates to a subject that everyone is interested in, viz., life. It is a sermon about how to really live, how to enjoy life, how to live a quality life. Everyone wants that, and in a way everyone is in their own way searching for that. And that's the tragedy of our generation that so many people look for quality living in all the wrong places and things.

How can we find a meaningful existence? What should our priorities be in order to be truly satisfied with life? Is it money, fame, education, position or power? How can we live with what seem to be the arbitrary changes life forces upon us and still be joyous? All these questions are clearly answered in the sermon of Solomon known in our Bibles as "Ecclesiastes".

Ecclesiastes means one who calls an assembly, an assembler, if you please. It is the Greek equivalent of Koheleth, the Hebrew word for Preacher. In this remarkable book the aged "Solomon" steps from the throne to the pulpit. He assembles us all together and says, "Let me tell you about life; let me tell you what does and doesn't work in life. I've tried it all". Indeed he did and from his experiences Solomon discovered and discussed what we need to find a truly quality life!

The key to a quality life begins with the development of a proper concept of the world itself, a proper world view. I call this sermon "Wisdom about the world". There have always been basically two views of the world. The secularist world view and the spiritual world view.

I. THE SECULARIST WORLD VIEW

A. Secularism finds its best expression in a document called by some the humanist Bible, the Humanist Manifestos I & II. In this document we find one of the most eloquent expressions of secularism and which has been signed by many notable and leading people in the political, scientific, and educational community.

B. Here are the features of the secularist view:

1. A world view without God (Quote); the earth and our place in it is all there is.
2. Autonomous man, making his own discoveries, seeking his own answers to life's problems.
3. Pursuit of the earthly, puts priority on earthly attainment, earthly position and power.
4. Is this proper view? Solomon says, "NO!"

II. ECCLESIASTES, GOD'S ANSWER TO SECULARISM

A. Ecclesiastes is a powerful indictment of secularism. It shows the logical consequences of such a view.

1:3-11 What is Solomon telling us?

The secular view of the world can only lead to pessimism and frustration (Vanity of vanities, all is vanity). Why?

It is really the result of four realities of life.

1. A transitory life--The earth lasts; but we don't! v. 3-4

2. A meaningless earth cycle--A world continues in a monotonous and meaningless cycle--1:5-7. What has been is what will be. There is nothing new under the sun.

3. Inadequate knowledge--Any attempt to find meaning in the world without God in view will be frustrated (v. 8) In the first place man cannot discover it all; he goes to the grave before he can grasp the whole picture. And then what you see and hear doesn't really satisfy you. Later Solomon described his own attempts to find satisfaction in education, wealth, power; only again to say, "All is vanity" (2:11).

4. Generational discontinuity--v. 9-11 And then another generation arises to take its place and repeat the process. What we've learned from history is that we hardly ever learn from history.

5. Bottom line: The utter vanity of life without God leads to an outlook of frustration and hopelessness. 1:2 What Solomon affirms is that life under the sun without God is vain; it provides no sense of meaning or purpose to those who live in it and to those who live for it. Those who try will end up like Solomon crying, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity".

6. But now add one more element and everything changes. Just simply add God to the equation.

B. THE SPIRITUAL WORLD VIEW, God's answer to secularism (3:1-20)

1. God is creator and controller of it all. We may be transitory; but God is eternal. He has the perspective we can't have. All of life, everything in its time, becomes a part of that which accomplishes the purpose of God.

He makes them all beautiful in their time (v. 11).

The vanity of life gives way to the purpose of God (v. 14) to fear him.

The inequalities of life give way to the judgment of God (v. 16-17).

2. God made the world the way he did that we might fear him.

He has given us the task of finding out what has been going on, in order to show us that we ultimately cannot know what has been going on. We can never master the world in which we live; nor can we control it.

We are utterly dependent upon him. He controls the changes of life. 9:1

We need to fear him and keep his command, 12:13.

With God in view the world is not meaningless; but instead moves forward in its created purpose!

3. Though we can never find satisfaction in earthly pursuits, God gives us the power to enjoy life here and prepares us for eternity.

One would think that developing a spiritual view of life would call for asceticism or a gloomy outlook. But rather God commands us to enjoy life!

Pursue what is right and enjoy living right. 3:12-13

What we could not discover by ourselves God has freely given us—wisdom to live! Hence we do not have to depend upon what another generation has discovered; we only need to keep trusting Him!

4. We will live in satisfaction and hope.

What we cannot have by throwing off God's restraint we can have by accepting it. By surrendering our lives to him, we gain them back again. We have learned to truly live. What Ecclesiastes teaches in practical and clear terms is what Jesus said the gospel was all about.

“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

“He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:39)

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. “For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Conclusion: And so the search for quality living starts with a proper view of life itself. It is a life under the control of God. God wants us all to enjoy that life. And he wants us to start early so that we will enjoy life before we get too old to enjoy it! 12:1