

**Listen to Wisdom
Eccl. 12:9-13**

Intro: I was tempted to end my sermon series on Ecclesiastes with our last lesson. We have discussed the bulk of the book and I have frequently appealed to some of these verses throughout the series. But the more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that we should not end our study of this book without considering the final section.

Ecclesiastes ends with an epilogue. On the basis of it, as well as the introductory statement of the book, there has been considerable discussion about whether these words are Solomon's or someone else's. Why would Solomon write about himself in the first person in the middle of the book and in the third person at the beginning and end of the book? It has led to endless speculation about the authorship and dating of the book.

That issue aside, the final section of the book is important. In fact, in it the author answers three important questions:

**Why should we listen to this author?
What is his ultimate message of wisdom?
Why should we heed that message?**

Why should we listen?

Because of what we know about "the preacher".

In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. (Ecclesiastes 12:9-10)

The preacher cared about people.

It is one thing to be wise. But Solomon was not merely a academician or theoretical philosopher. He was a teacher! It is one thing to be interested in heady things. It is quite another to care about people, to want others to know what you have learned so that their life may be better.

The preacher put effort into his study.

*He pondered—i.e. weighed, made careful evaluation
He searched out—indicates thoroughness and balance
He arranged many proverbs—gave thought to skillful orderliness and digestion of information into powerful sayings, not rambling orations*

The preacher was concerned about the impact of his message

Sought to find delightful words—he was concerned about the reception of his words; he wanted them to be readily and willingly heard, and not resisted because they were offensive

Write words of truth correctly—He wanted to be accurate and concise; he wanted to speak the truth, not just what people were pleased to hear.

For all of us who teach it is important that we learn these valuable from “the preacher”.

We all first of all need to earn the right to speak (to become wise)—and that not just know a lot about the Bible. Wisdom involves practice as well as teaching.

We need to care about people.

We must put serious effort into our study.

We must give attention to how we present our message.

We must be concerned not only about pleasing our audiences, but pleasing God and speaking the truth.

Because of what we know about wise words.

The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; (Ecclesiastes 12:11a)

Wise words are like cattle prods. They are intended to move us along. Most of us are content to leave well enough alone; but the wise words will, not only comfort the afflicted, they will afflict the comfortable. So if my words sometimes cause pain...

Masters of these collections of wise words are like well-driven nails. What is the point of the simile? Stability and permanence?

Would we be more prone to listen to wisdom if we knew that wise words stimulate us to action where change is needed and give us a sense of confidence and steadfastness when the world is needlessly and erroneously changing around us?

Because of what we know about wisdom’s ultimate source

they are given by one Shepherd. (Eccl. 12:11b)

The Shepherd in this text seems to be God; and this is Ecclesiastes’ claim to divine authorship for the message. What we are reading is not then merely the musing of a smart man, but the loving food of a Shepherd who knows what we as His sheep need to live and thrive!

Because of what we know about the writings of men.

But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. (Ecclesiastes 12:12)

First Solomon reminds us that there are an inexhaustible number of books being written. Everyone has a “best seller” and is eager for you take the time to consider what they’ve written.

You can wear yourself out trying to read all that there is to read, to the point of exhaustion—and still know nothing! But if we have read the words of the one Shepherd, we already know all we ultimately need to know. What man has written cannot add to it!

What is the message?

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)
The claim of Ecclesiastes is that the writer has considered and addressed life from every angle. It is not a haphazard and quickly thought out piece of literature. It gives wisdom with a note of finality and completeness. And what is the bottom line?

Fear God and keep His Commandments

Fearing God is a repeated theme. Earlier in the series we looked at several reasons why we need to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

But now the wise man enlarges upon that exhortation to show us the ultimate manifestation of respect. If we truly respect God we will:

Keep His commandments

A timeless principle of respect for God. I still stand amazed at how easily people can justify a life of disobedience to God while claiming to maintain a genuine respect and love for God. The form of God's law changes; but the obligation to obey never changes.

Why should we heed this message?

Because this applies to every person!

The expression is in Hebrew “Ci ze Cal ha’adam”

Literally “for this is every man”

“Cal ha’adam” and is used in other texts for “everyone” or “everybody” (3:13; 5:19).

The KJV & NIV says “this is the whole duty of man”

The NASV says “this applies to every person”.

And so the idea might be that this is the universal obligation of everyone!

Because God will bring every act to judgment

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

Temporal or eternal? Many think that the concept of an eternal judgment was beyond the scope of the wise man's thoughts. But the concept of judgment at the end of life was a prominent thought even among pagan peoples. Is it conceivable that God's people had no awareness of their ultimate accountability to God?

It seems that that Ecclesiastes argues for an ultimate day of judgment to bring some resolution to the vanity of earth life. And perhaps in the final words we see a glimpse of the prospect. This judgment will:

Universal (all men will experience it)

Comprehensive (every act, even the hidden ones will be brought to light)

Thus, we all the more reason to fear God and keep His commands.

Conclusion: More than once people have mentioned the obvious relevance of the message of Ecclesiastes to our society. Read the last words of Eaton's commentary if time allows.