

Title: **ECCLESIASTES**
 All Emptiness Under the Sun
 All Fulness In The Son

Text: Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

Subject: *The Meaninglessness of Life Without Christ*

Introduction:

It comes as a great surprise to many that the Word of God was deliberately written in such a way as to confuse unbelieving people. To the believer, to the sinner who has been born of God and granted eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to believe, it is a Book unsealed, open, and clear. To the unbeliever, it is a book of confusion.

This fact is nowhere more obviously demonstrated than in the comments generally given about the Book of Ecclesiastes. The vast majority of that which I have seen written about and heard spoken about this Book describes it as a book of pessimism. Most tell us that this Book of Solomon's wisdom is little more than the rantings of a disappointed man, frustrated with life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

One thing that makes this Book so confusing to many is that it is a Book full of errors. It is divinely inspired; but it is full of errors. Let me show you.

- In chapter 3 Solomon tells us that there is no difference between men and beasts, and that man dies like a dog and returns to dust (vv. 19-20).
- In verse 22 he tells us that the best thing a man can do is to rejoice in the works of his own hands.
- In chapter four he tells us that the dead are better off than the living and that non-existence is better than both (vv. 2-3).

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

The reason many have difficulty understanding this Book is that they fail to see that Solomon is here giving us the meaning of life from two points of view.

First, he shows us how the man without Christ must see things. What sad words those are—“*without Christ!*” Those who are without Christ are without God and without hope. The natural, unregenerate man lives in constant frustration. He is constantly looking for something to give him satisfaction, because there is no meaning to his life. Nothing under the sun can satisfy his immortal soul. When eternity bound creatures have earth bound hearts, they live in constant frustration and misery. Such poor souls constantly feel what Solomon declares from their point of view—“*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*” When the natural man looks over his life, he is forced to conclude, though he tries with all his might to deny it, “*all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun*” (2:11). That is how the Book begins.

(Ecclesiastes 1:1-2) "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. {2} Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity."

But the wisdom God gave Solomon taught him to never to look for satisfaction under to sun, but to look for and find satisfaction in Christ, the Son. The person who is born of God, the person who trusts Christ, the person who is taught of the Spirit, finds meaning to his whole life and to all that is involved in life. His life has meaning because he lives in Christ and Christ lives in him. That's how the Book ends.

(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the

whole *duty* of man. {14} For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil."

- “*Fear God*”—Worship God,
- “*Keep his commandments*”—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23).
- Live for eternity—“*For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*”

Everything between shows us the emptiness of life without Christ and the vanity of seeking satisfaction in this world. This book is given as a beacon, that we may be spared the bitterness of learning the vanity of the things of earth by finding their waters to fail; that we may seek Christ and find all in him.

Proposition: Throughout these twelve chapters Solomon alternates between these two points of view, showing us the futility of seeking satisfaction in the things of time and sense, and teaching us to look to Christ, finding all fulness in him.

THE NATURAL MAN’S VIEW

The natural man, the unregenerate man has a wrong view of everything. He has a wrong view of everything spiritual; but he also has a wrong view of everything in this world. This is what Solomon shows us in Ecclesiastes. In this Book God chose, by divine inspiration, to preserve in his Word the carnal reasoning of the natural man "*under the sun.*" We will evaluate this man's thinking in the light of God's Word.

1. **He has a perverted view of the universe** (1:4-7; 2:24).

He sees the universe as a great piece of machinery, without meaning, just existence. When he looks at himself, he sees another machine and reasons, "I'm just like the wind and rain; just a drop in the cycles that are ever moving." This perverted view of the universe gives him...

2. A perverted view of God (3:1-9, 18-22).

Man has a God consciousness from which he can never escape. But his thoughts of God are perverted. He sees God only as an impersonal force to be reckoned with, not as an almighty, gracious Redeemer to worship, trust and love. There is a reason why reprobate men look upon God in this way. God has blinded the heart of the natural man in judgment (3:11).

(Ecclesiastes 3:11) "He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

3. The natural man has a perverse attitude toward righteousness and wickedness (7:14-17).

He does not understand that he is wicked; and he does not understand that righteousness is found only in Christ, that righteousness is the gift of God and the work of God. So he presumes that he is to balance the scales of justice by his deeds.

(Ecclesiastes 7:14-17) "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. {15} All *things* have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that prolongeth *his life* in his wickedness. {16} Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why

shouldest thou destroy thyself? {17} Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?"

He reasons, "If the far-away God balances things, why shouldn't we do the same?" Therefore, he adopts this attitude: "Don't be too righteous and don't be too wicked." The religious middle-of-the-road philosophy of our day says, "Do the best you can under the circumstances."

This is the thinking of the natural man. "No one is perfect. We just have to do the best we can (7:20).

(Ecclesiastes 7:20) "For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

4. **The natural man has a terribly perverted view of life and death** (9:1-7).

(Ecclesiastes 9:1-7) "For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is* before them. {2} All *things come* alike to all: *there is* one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; *and* he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. {3} This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. {4} For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. {5} For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. {6} Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in

any *thing* that is done under the sun. {7} Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works."

The man "*under the sun*" thinks that everyone will ultimately share a common fate. He reasons that one final end is in store for all—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the evil, the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not. His view of life is that the grave ends all. Many false religions of our day are quick to quote verse 5. But mark this--this statement is *not* divine revelation! By God's inspiration, these words are included in the Scriptures, but they are the words of a man "*under the sun*."

5. **The natural man's perverted view of things makes him a slave to the present, a slave to the world, a slave to his own lusts** (9:7-10).

(Ecclesiastes 9:7-10) "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. {8} Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. {9} Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. {10} Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

The man "*under the sun*" reasons that he must make the best of every day by eating well, enjoying life, and making his heart merry. What a picture of the present age! Dress spotlessly; use the most expensive perfumes; live it up! Why? Because a common fate awaits all. But even in the midst of profane hilarity, the natural man is horribly sad, frustrated, and miserable.

(Ecclesiastes 9:11-12) "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. {12} For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so *are* the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

There is no song to brighten his life. No praise is heard from his lips. Just vanity! But there is another view of things!

CHRIST'S GLORY

Against this dark, dark background, Solomon sets forth the glory of our great God and Savior. It is interspersed throughout these chapters. It is Christ alone who gives purpose and meaning to life. And we find that purpose and meaning only as we find him. This book is one long exposition of our Savior's words to the Samaritan woman, "*Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again.*" The book presents the world in its best aspect, yet says emphatically, "*Satisfaction is not there.*"

In **chapter 2** we have a striking parallel to **Romans 7**. Both chapters are full of the personal pronoun "I", and the result in both is failure and misery. In Ecclesiastes 2 Solomon says, "*I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth...I said...I sought...I made...I builded...I planted...I got...I gathered...so I was great...Then I looked, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit.*"

The pronoun "I" appears thirty-six times in this chapter, and over thirty times in Romans 7. Romans 7 is the expression of what we are in and of ourselves. In us and with us all is vanity and

vexation of spirit. But in Romans 8, we look out of ourselves to Christ. Losing sight of self, we are consumed with Christ and life in him. The result is “*No condemnation...more than conquerors...no separation!*”

A. M. Hodgkin wrote, “When self is the center of our life, and everything is looked at from that standpoint, all is failure. When we find in Christ a new center and everything revolves round him, then all falls into its right place, and we find rest and satisfaction to our souls. We begin then to ask about everything – not “How will this affect me?” but “How will this affect my Lord and Master?” Does it touch his honor? Does it bring glory to him?”

WHITE ROBES

As I said, there are, dispersed through these twelve chapters, many words of spiritual instruction and instructive pictures of gospel truth. “*Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment*” (9:8). Obviously, these words, when considered from a believer’s perspective, do not refer to outward, carnal things, but to inward, spiritual things.

How can we keep ourselves unspotted in such an evil world? How can we be continually “*unto God a sweet savour of Christ*”? “*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*” If we walk in the light as he is in the light, trusting Christ alone as “*the Lord our Righteousness,*” constantly acknowledging and confessing that we are, in and of ourselves, nothing but sin, the blood of Christ constantly cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-2:2). We are kept clean before God by the merit, power, and efficacy of his sin-atoning sacrifice. Redeemed sinners, once they are born of God, “*have an unction from the Holy One...and the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you*”(1 John 2:20, 27). This anointing is the Holy

Spirit himself who seals us in grace and seals to us all the blessings of the covenant of grace (Eph. 1:3-14).

THE LITTLE CITY

There is a short parable in chapter 9 (vv. 14-15) with a delightful message. “*There was a little city, and few men in it.*”—This is a picture of the earth which the Lord God has given to the children of men; a speck in his great universe, yet he is mindful of man and visited him (Ps. 8:4-6; Heb. 2:6-10).

“*And there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.*”—Our Savior said, “*The prince of this world cometh.*”. Paul tells us that the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel should shine unto them. Thus Satan has laid siege to the city of Mansoul.

“*Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city.*”—We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, and was found in fashion as a man, and, humbling himself, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He is that wise Man who, by his Wisdom, delivers the city. The preaching of that cross is unto them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

“*Yet no man remembered that same poor man.*”—It is written, “*My people have forgotten me days without number...forgotten that they were purged from their old sins.*” Again, we read in the Book of God, “*Of the ten cleansed there were not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger.*” Oh, redeemed children of men, “*forget not all his benefits!*”

SEED SOWN

Chapter 11 contains words of encouragement as we seek to serve the interests of our God in this world by the gospel. “*Cast thy bread (seed-corn) upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*” When the Nile River overflows its banks in Egypt, the rice grain is literally cast upon the fields while they are under water, to spring up in due season.

In the parable of the sower, our Lord tells us plainly that, “*the seed is the word.*” The ground upon which the seed is sown, be it shallow, or trodden down, or preoccupied, or good – that is, soft and empty, and receptive – is the human heart. It contains nothing good of itself.

By the preaching of the gospel, the gospel seed is sown randomly. We cannot tell what sort of ground it will fall upon, but in this passage in Ecclesiastes God gives the faithful sower the promise of success. “*Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good;*” but prosper it shall (Isa. 55:11). Therefore, we are to be diligent in sowing, whether it be morning or evening, and whichever way the wind blows (11:6, 4). “*Preach the Word,*” Paul says to Timothy; “*be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*” “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 15:58).

REMEMBER NOW

Let all who hear or read the words of wisdom given in this Book heed its doctrine. Trust Christ, worship and serve him in the days of your youth, before your life of vanity utterly hardens your

heart. Seek him while he may be found, in the days of your youth, because the old seldom seek him.

(Ecclesiastes 11:9-10) "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment. {10} Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity."

(Ecclesiastes 12:1-7) "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; {2} While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: {3} In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, {4} And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; {5} Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is high*, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: {6} Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. {7} Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

OUR SHEPHERD

In chapter 12 (v. 11) we see that our only source of wisdom, grace, salvation, fulness and security is in one Shepherd.

(Ecclesiastes 12:11) "The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd."

That Shepherd is Christ!

(John 10:14-16) "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. {15} As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. {16} And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd."

(John 10:27-28) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: {28} And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand."

CONCLUSION

(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. {14} For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil."

- "Fear God"—Worship God,
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- Live for eternity—"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"

(2 Corinthians 4:17-18) "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; (18) While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

(2 Corinthians 5:1-11) "For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. (6) Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (7) (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) (8) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (9) Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (11) Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences."

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- ¹ Date: Danville (Tuesday PM—07/01/03)
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Readings: *Larry Brown and Larry Criss*