

---

*“Equipping believers for **growth** and **service** by encountering God through his word.”*

# The Bible for Today

October 28, 2009



---

# The Emphasis of Ecclesiastes

*“Vanity...Everything is Vanity.”*

- The transitory nature of present life
- A challenge to live wisely in a world where the only certain thing is death and judgment
- All human pursuits are futile, especially those that do not take into account the “fear of the Lord”
- The world is not neat and tidy as we would like it to be; there is doubt, unfairness, and darkness as well as light, joy, happiness, and justice

---

# Why is it in the Bible?

- Argued over by the Jewish rabbis, but calls us to ponder the imponderable things of life.
- Used during the Feast of Tabernacles; reminds us of the brevity of life, even in the midst of celebration.
- (Gregory Thaumaturgas/ 270) “to show that all the affairs and pursuits of humankind are vain and useless in order to lead us to contemplation of heavenly things.”
- Is honest and asks the hard questions of life.

---

# Who is the Teacher/ Writer?

- Qohelet— “The assembler/ gatherer.” The preacher/ teacher of wisdom. A famous teacher in early Judaism?
- Jerome for the Latin Vulgate— Ecclesiastes/ *ekklesia*— “assembly”
- Solomon— probably not; “a king” in a role of wisdom.
- Date: Persian Period/ 539-332 BCE (internal evidence/ Persian words)

---

# Difficult Book to Read

- Seems to ramble, not linear/ straightforward as in Western logic.
- Some antithetical statements— opposites of each other in the book and in the same verses.
- Many negative statements, which seem contradictory to the overall message of scripture.

Often read/ studied as:

1. *Cynical*— a “foil,” an outlook on life to be avoided
2. *Positive*— If this is it, then enjoy the gift of life from God

---

# Help for Reading Ecclesiastes

## Dominate Realities for Qohelet:

1. God is the indisputable reality/ the Creator of all things (but not active in it).
2. God's ways are not always (if ever) understood.
3. For humans, the world is not tidy; the righteous do not always get good; life is messy. "There is injustice; it just is."
4. Death is the great equalizer of all people (Qohelet has no hope for resurrection—Sadducees)

---

# What Qohelet Believes...

## How do we live well before God?

He believes:

- In God and trusts him (2:24; 3:11-14; 5:7, 19; 9:27)
- That God is just (3:17; 8:12-13)

But, the world is not predictable like Job's "comforters" believe. Qohelet is trying to be authentic, honest, about the circumstances of life.

It is God's ultimate responsibility to right wrong and to know some things that are not the privilege of humankind to know (cf. Genesis 1-11).

---

# Vanity, Vanity, all is Vanity.

Hebel— (wisp of air, vapor, mist, meaninglessness) The word is used in Ecclesiastes 37 times of the 73 used in the OT.

- Humanity is transitory, passing through, like a vapor; we cannot control it. (1 Peter 1—“sojourners”).
- The world will continue on after you are gone, just as it did before you arrived.

---

# Misreading/ Misinterpreting Ecclesiastes

The book is not condoning of “eat, drink, and be merry” hedonism. Qohelet combines hebel and shimha (joy) as seen in life’s complexities (and in the same verses). There is a tension in life between vanity and joy; meaninglessness and purposefulness; doubt and faith.

*Qohelet asks: “What should we do with life’s inequities and what about the ultimate meaninglessness of the lives of those who live apart from God?”*

---

# The Answer to Qohelet's Question...

- Live life as a gift from God; enjoy the journey, not what you get (materially or otherwise) during life.
- Joy comes by living well during the rhythms of life, because everything is passing away.
- Accept happiness and joy in life when it comes; savor it because you cannot control it.
- If you are always looking for some future happiness or joy, you will be disappointed by not living well in the moments when joy comes.

---

# Advice to the Reader/ Young Student

- “Fear God by keeping his commandments” because this gives meaning to life.
- Enjoy your youth, but remember God is in it.

*The wise will see the differences in life and choose the path that leads to meaning and joy.*

*“The good of life is living it.”*

---

*“The good of life is in living it. The profit of work is in doing it, not any profit or residue (which will be given to descendants). The fruit of wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge and understanding mysteries, (but) recognizing the limitations of human knowledge and power. Humankind is not the measure of all things. Thus enjoy the real, but limited satisfaction (of life).”*

RBY Scott  
Ecclesiastes

---

# The Bible for Today

- Calls us to be honest with people about the complexities of life.
- God is just and can be trusted, even if we do not see it at the moment.
- As believers, it helps us to be honest with those who are suffering/ finding difficulties in life (we may not have all the answers).
- Stop living for the future; live well now.
- God gives grace in Christ—there is hope and resurrection and restoration (the full story).