

Ecc02 – Harsh Reality/Solid Hope – Ecclesiastes 1:3-11

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I count about fifteen incredibly positive, potentially life-changing lessons in the Book of Ecclesiastes. But all that solid hope is interspersed throughout the “harsh reality” of the way most of us are “chasing life”. Ecclesiastes is about the harsh reality of *life on this earth* and the solid hope of *God and eternity*.

Let’s pray. *Lord, Jesus, would you show us that? Lord, would you light your Word on fire in our hearts? Would you make it come alive by your Spirit so we would be transported from this temporal, fleeting, soon to be vaporized life under the sun to the eternal life that you have reserved for us? Set our eyes beyond this life to eternity. Show us, Lord, the deep meaning of this special book. In your name, Jesus, amen.*

The way Ecclesiastes is written is, first Solomon wants you knocked down, face on the mat with the referee slamming his hand on the floor counting to ten. As you’re laying on the mat, eyes unfocused, a puddle of drool forming at the edge of your mouth, you’re hearing the count – 6... 7... 8... 9... and then right before the lights go out, *you get it!* *You get it* – like Sylvester Stallone in Rocky 14. Suddenly everything comes into focus and you slowly raise yourself off the mat to fight with *new strength* and a *new approach*, and how you look at the *battle of life* is forever changed.

Maybe because of *traumatic brain injury* you got from boxing or maybe because you are *genuinely listening* to what God is saying in the Book of Ecclesiastes, this metaphorical knock out punch from Solomon can forever change how you look at life *without* you having to suffer from *actual traumatic brain injury*.

So today, we’re going to start with another dose of harsh reality. But then we’re going to do a quick survey of the solid hope that is interwoven throughout this book. I want to give you a sneak-peak at the solid hope that exists in Ecclesiastes, because I’m afraid if we just march through the harsh reality without clearly knowing the solid hope that’s in this book, I’m afraid I might be alone in here before we reach the end.

So, we begin this week with another *harsh reality check* just like last week in our first message.

Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NLT)

3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?

Notice this phrase “*under the sun*” very carefully. It’s not “under the sea” sung by a Jamaican crab. It is a crucial phrase used twenty-seven times in just twelve chapters.

This phrase is key to understanding what Solomon is referring to as *meaningless* (or futile) in regards to *this life*. The scene Solomon is reviewing here, the stage where this great drama is acted out is this earth “*under the sun*”. This phrase sets his frame of reference. He’s referring to things that occur *on this earth* in *this temporal life*.

All things “*under the sun.*”

So, with the boundaries of Solomon’s investigation set, let’s read the *harsh reality* of Ecclesiastes 1:3-11.

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11 (NLT)

3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?

4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes.

5 The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again.

6 The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles.

7 Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.

8 Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

9 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.

10 Sometimes people say, “Here is something new!” But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new.

11 We don’t remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

That could be a strong dose of *depressing harsh reality*. Solomon is describing the cyclical nature of this life under the sun and at the core of it, the cyclical nature of life *is the same*. We may have the new iPhone 10 but they had the new bronze chariot wheel and when it comes to the true “meaning in life” there’s really no difference.

But don’t get Solomon wrong – he’s not saying life itself is *hopeless* and we should all *just give up*.

What he is saying is
this “*daily grind life*”

this life “*under the sun*”

this life of *repeating what has always been done* before us

that is *not the end all* – that is *not the real goal*... This day-to-day flurry of activity we find ourselves in is *not the “true meaning and purpose in life.”* There’s *something more* we were made for. *Something greater* we should be *focused on*. *Something more* we should be *pushing toward*.

It’s almost as if this inner hope that is interspersed throughout this book is like our lives. There’s *solid hope* interspersed in our lives but it’s interspersed in the *harsh reality* of this life.

That is what Solomon set out to determine – what is *the greater thing* in this life “under the sun” that we should be striving for – or is the hamster wheel of this daily chase really what makes up everything that’s important?

Remember I told you last week Ecclesiastes is not a pessimistic or fatalistic book. Ecclesiastes is the *wisest man in the world* challenging us about what the true meaning and purpose in life *IS*.

After he has *searched all* there was to be searched, after he had *experienced all* there was to experience, after Solomon chased *every possible* fulfillment and pleasure, all he wants to do is to *challenge us* and *warn us* to find *true meaning and purpose* in life. Not the fake vapor of a meaning and purpose but God’s true meaning and purpose.

Remember how we started the first message last week with all the surveys about people (especially young people) wanting true meaning and purpose in their life? Well, Solomon does give us the answer to that desire in this book. After a life of experiencing *all* that can be experienced he gives us the only answer he could find. But that answer is often buried in the *negative results* of Solomon’s search.

So, we’re going to do our best to *not miss* that answer.

I’m going to review some of the pieces that make up Solomon’s only answer – *right now*. Then we’re going to remind ourselves of that “*right answer*” as we continue to face the mountain of wrong answers that Solomon got from his “*great search for life’s meaning*.”

So, I’m going to ask you to follow me in your Bible and mark some scriptures, so if nothing else, you’ll be able to come back to Ecclesiastes point to these verses and say *this* is what God (through Solomon) say is the “*true meaning and purpose in life*” – okay?

This is not the only time we'll look at these scriptures so we're going to review them today and you mark them in your Bible (and we'll return later).

And, for time's sake, I'll read just portions of some of the verses in order to try to make just *one overall point*. I want you to see the big picture of Ecclesiastes.

Here we go. Turn to Ecclesiastes 2:24.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 (NLT)

24 So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God.

This “*enjoy food and drink*” that we will see a lot of in this book is *not* a reference to partying or worldly hedonism. In Ecclesiastes this phrase is written to convey “*be content with what you have and what you do.*” Be content with what you have and enjoy your work! Because... *these pleasures are from the hand of God.*

Continuing,

Ecclesiastes 2:25-26(A) (NLT)

25 For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?

26 God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please him . . .

So, our first solid hope scripture seems kind of “simplistic” doesn't it? Be content with what you *have* and what you *DO* and gain *wisdom, knowledge and joy* from *pleasing God*.

That doesn't sound too complicated.

Let's continue.

Ecclesiastes 3:11(A) (NLT)

11 Yet God has made everything beautiful for (or in) its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart . . .

God has planted Eternity in EVERY Human Heart

So, if all we're doing is chasing the vaporizing things of this world, we are certainly only *chasing the wind* because God has put an eternal desire in our heart!

Then mark the next two verses – Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 because these verses are saying the same thing our first verse did. I'll read just Ecclesiastes 3:13.

Ecclesiastes 3:13 (NLT)

13 And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

There it is again, *be content and enjoy your work – this is a gift from God*. Do you see the secret of life already simplified? Be content. Be happy with what you do in your day. Seek God for wisdom and knowledge and joy by pleasing him. Understand that eternity is the core that's in your heart. These are gifts from God.

Just think about that. After all the more of all the more of everything that Solomon could ever get more of or experience more of, he *keeps* coming back to: *be content, enjoy your work and know that your joy comes from God*.

And then look at the very next verse.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 (NLT)

14 And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose is that people should fear him.

Please hear me – this “fear” is *not scary fear*. This “fear God” means *to reverently worship him, knowing that in all things, God alone – is God*.

It means to acknowledge that his sovereignty is absolute, and your job is to worship him. And to know that in all things God is God and you are not. That is fearing God. It's recognizing his omnipotence and his omniscience and his sovereignty and his worth to be praised. Fear God. God's purpose is that people should fear him.

*Be CONTENT in what you HAVE and what you DO
Know your JOY comes from God and fills the eternal hole, the void that he's put in you
REVERENTLY WORSHIP him in all things*

Are you beginning to see a pattern here?

Did you really think Solomon was going to say the secret to true meaning in life was winning the Mega-Money-Power Ball lottery? He already won it and he realized it was worthless.

And then, just as a mention, put a mark at Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. This is where we learn how *critically important* the *closest relationships* we have in life are. *BOTH* our *vertical relationship* with God *and* our *horizontal relationships* with others. The relationships we have in this life with God and with others *create true meaning and purpose here*.

And then *really mark* these next verses because here Solomon is reiterating what he has *already said – twice.*

Ecclesiastes 5:18(B)–20 (NLT)

18 . . . It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life. (Be content – with what you HAVE, and what you DO, understand your life is a VAPOR, accept your place that God has put you. Be CONTENT)

19 And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life—this is indeed a gift from God. (If God gives you wealth and health, then praise God – enjoy your work and accept your lot in life – it is a gift from God)

20 God keeps such people (who are content with their ‘lot’) ***so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.***

This focus on true meaning and purpose in life *totally dismantles* so much of what we’ve been *taught to chase after – “under the sun.”*

But, moving on. Put a mark at Ecclesiastes 9:9-10. Allow me just to paraphrase it.

Eccl 9:9-10 (Paraphrase)

Live happily with the woman you love . . . [for] the wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly [work]. [And] Whatever you do, do [it] well [with all your might] . . .

.

Again – a similar, critical – *be content* statement.

Live happily with the woman you love
She is your Reward for all your work here
And whatever you do - do it with all your might

Are you getting the feeling that God’s version of *true meaning and purpose* in life is *simpler* than what our “get all you can” culture wants us to believe? All these verses of solid hope for this life “***under the sun***” is what the *wisest, wealthiest, most powerful* man in the Bible determined by his own trial and error to be the *most important wisdom* that he could *impart to us to point us* in the right direction – for us to find true meaning and purpose – in our lives “***under the sun.***”

And now we’re getting close to the grand finale. Next look at Ecclesiastes 11:5.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 (NLT)

5 Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother's womb, so you cannot understand the activity of God, who does all things.

This verse is about *embracing and trusting* God's sovereignty. It's about stopping the craziness of us thinking we deserve to *understand God* or that we deserve to *understand the activity of God*.

How many Christians say, "why did God do that?" We have to let God be God. That's what this is saying. You can't understand the wind, you can't understand a tiny baby growing, you can't understand the activity of God. He's doing all things. You acknowledge his sovereignty and be at peace.

Next, maybe just draw a line in the margin of your Bible at Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 from verse 1 to verse 7. And again, allow me to just skim through these verses so you can get the "big idea."

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 (NLT)

1 Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator . . .

2 Remember him before the light . . . is dim to your old eyes . . .

3 Remember him before your legs . . . start to tremble.

[Remember Him] before your shoulders . . . stoop.

Remember him before your teeth . . . stop grinding.

[Remember Him] before your eyes . . . see dimly.

4 Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed. . .

5 Remember him before you become fearful . . .

[Remember him] before your hair turns white . . .

Remember him before you near the grave . . .

6 Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps . . . 7 For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Are you seeing a single, steady train of thought here? Are you starting to see the great *wisdom of life* that is interwoven throughout this book?

And so here is the *final, overriding goal* of Ecclesiastes.

Wait a minute... am I going to give you the final, overriding goal of Ecclesiastes in the *second message*? Yes, I am, because I want you to press through this *deeply meaningful*

book with me. I don't want you to say to your wife, "I'll come back when he starts teaching about how God will give me everything I want."

I desperately want you to dig deeply into this book and allow it to have the impact on your life that *God designed* it to have.

So... here is the final, overriding goal of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It's found in the final two verses. After all is said and done, after the incredible, try everything, do everything, be everything life of King Solomon, the wisest man on earth sums up all of life with these two incredibly simple verses.

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 (NLT)

13 That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.

14 God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.

Referring to the entire book, Solomon says, *That's the whole story* and we're going to go back and see the whole story. He's talking about twelve chapters of harsh reality about the relative meaninglessness of this life without God under the sun.

And after all of the all – of the more than all – that Solomon gained and experience and investigated in his majestic life – after all that, here is his final conclusion: ***Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.***

Why?... Because ***God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.***

So, now you know the end of the story. So, as we go through the rest of the book, I'll always be able to point you to the solid hope that God has interwoven in this life. And if you'll *trust God and believe what he says*, Ecclesiastes will point you to a life of *true meaning and purpose*.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, would you do that in us? Would you speak to us as we begin to plow through the harsh realities that Ecclesiastes points out? Lord, would you bring us to this place that you alone embody – the true meaning and true purpose of life? That the eternity that you've put in our heart is the secret to understanding why we're here. And Lord, make us content in a non-content culture. Make us content with what we have and what we do, and allow us to walk in joy by fearing you reverently and serving you and knowing you. Lord give us the desire, a commitment, a passion to break the mold that this culture tries to shove us into. And instead, Lord, help us receive from your Word, by your*

Spirit, the true meaning and purpose of this life. We trust you to do it. We pray you would be glorified in our lives as you do. In your name, Jesus, amen.