

Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Eccles 1:1-11

Author: Solomon.

Recap on Solomon series. He was the king who prayed for wisdom from God at a time when he had obtained power by eliminating opponents and things were politically unstable. God offered him anything he wanted and because he asked for a wise thing, he got everything. He became the most powerful ruler on earth at the time. He had much by way of riches and was a man of great learning.

But he was the man who threw it all away for women – particularly foreign women. He had it all but he ended with a nation dividing on itself.

This seems to be written at the end of his life. He had it all, learned it all, experienced it all. Now here is his verdict on life. Verse 2 - *It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless.* Superficially it's a depressing book, and it's meant to be. It strips human life bare, it takes it right back to its fundamental meaning and Solomon's conclusion. Is that it's vanity, meaningless, useless. There we are, the verdict on life of one of the wisest men who ever lived.

Why is it useless? Solomon tells a truth that even in our modern society, people don't want to hear. You see it is the whole premise of our society that we are bettering ourselves, becoming greater and wiser through our knowledge and technology than people in past generations. We are becoming more civilised. We have power over the atom. We have knowledge of the very root of biological life.

We've advanced more than any other generation. We have bettered them. But have we really? Look at major world issues. Our technology may have changed, our society may have become more learned but we still do the same as in previous generations. We have prayed for Syria. We have prayed for Kenya. The same cycles of violence, war, unrest, crime and all the rest are still prevalent without change in modern society.

You don't have to go far even in Felixstowe to find people for whom life is already pointless and you can see it in patterns of alcoholism, bingeing, drug taking, crime.

Solomon says four things about why in the last conclusion, life is pointless.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

3 *You spend your life working, labouring, and what do you have to show for it?* We build up nice homes and all the rest of it. We work hard – or not as the case may be. But as it has been wisely said, one second after death, the state of the world's richest person is the same as everyone else. Whatever we have in life, we can't take it with us. The implication is: so what's the point? The world's richest king ended life a troubled man he had it all but in the death stakes, none of it could help him at all..

NOTHING CHANGES

Generations come and generations go, but the world stays just the same. Has knowledge and technology make us more civilised? Certainly not. The world remains just as dangerous a place as back in the days of Solomon – in some respects more so. I guess that many people thought that under Solomon Israel had made it. Gone were the wars and instability under David. Solomon didn't have to be a warlord. He had time to develop the finer things in life for him and his people. Did it last? No. His behaviour ended up no better than his predecessors, perhaps worse in the light of God's blessings,

and his country descended into anarchy in the final years of his reign and split after his death.

The last two hundred years have been centuries of unparalleled human advancement, but at the same time we had the war to end all wars, which didn't and we had an even worse one 20 years later, and genocide has continued ever since. There have only been 4 years of world peace since 1945.

YOU CAN TIRE OF IT

Everything leads to weariness--a weariness too great for words. Our eyes can never see enough to be satisfied; our ears can never hear enough.

What we can't escape from in life that things always continue to move on whether we have the strength to cope with change or not. It's something one gets to understand during middle age. How can we keep up with the younger generation? That isn't a new thing either – it's been around since Solomon. There's another aspect to this. If one life is all we've got, then we try to do our best to make it have meaning for now. It's the idea of eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. For the world, that's their logic. If we have one life, make it have meaning and be satisfying for yourself, because one day you're going to die and that will be it for you. People can go through the struggles of life looking at those who have much with envy because they have a comfortable life and they don't. Every day people commit suicide because they can't see any point in life.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

There is nothing new in the whole world. "Look," they say, "here is something new!" But no, it has all happened before, long before we were born.

There's nothing new under the sun. Yes, there is new technology and all that, but Solomon is right, in terms of ideas, culture, attitude, ways of thinking – there is very little in this world that's truly original. When I was in Spurgeons I was told (correctly) that if I come up with a new idea, then it probably isn't – someone has thought of it before. The most important thing when we do anything in life, is see who's done it or thought of it before. There truly is nothing new – just the same old thing dressed up in a new way. Take any issue in life and you'll find that's true. We've been that way before.

So is Ecclesiastes depressing? In one sense to end up with the judgement on life that Solomon came to, that it's meaningless is depressing because all we have and achieve we can't take with us. We get one shot, and we are either satisfied with it or not. But the end is death.

That is a world view of life and death and if we just left things there then I'd wonder why that's in the Bible. We'll find later that Solomon did find a solution that made life have meaning as if you couldn't guess what that is. Thankfully we have the view that Solomon later developed and is most perfectly developed in the NT. God is eternal, and in Christ there is eternal life. Our future hope in Him is what gives life meaning.

So why do we have Ecclesiastes. My first impression is that it exists to help us understand that in our fallen state, life is meaningless and pointless. Whatever we build up, whatever influence we have, who remembers us in 50 years time, 100 years time. The only people truly remembered are the great and the good, not the nameless people who were their peers. And what about those statues we see in cities of great civic people. Who are they? I don't know. In Cardiff there is a statue of John Batchelor, friend of freedom. Who

was he? I don't know, I had to look him up in Wikipedia. All his statue is famous for is for the vandals who climb up it and put empty drinks cans in his open hand. I suppose his stature at least will make him remembered if people look him up.

Who will remember us? In a world perspective, nobody. Our family will remember us until the last with a memory of me dies. One day I will just be an entry in MRBC history – if another one is ever written. My name appears in BU handbooks in libraries. I will be on censuses. But Mark Reid? In 100 years, who's he?

Solomon is fortunate, at least he's got a history known about by countless million – and the conclusion he came to about life, and the bad reputation he gained for himself as the man who blew it all.

I hope that in Ecclesiastes we will get the truth about life, life without God and without Christ. We will get it writ large. We are supposed to. God wants us to know that life without Him is truly pointless, but what we know now is that in Christ there is hope meaning and purpose.

Never allow yourself to get into the world's way of thinking. We are citizens of another place. We have our treasure laid up there. We build our lives for what will last, for eternity. We gloring in the riches of God's grace. Get the perspcteve, because that's where Ecclesiastes will take us.

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