

SUNDAY August 10, 2025 “Meaningless”**Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 3- (sung- Turn, turn, turn) and 5:1-7**

We continue our summer series “At Your Request” with our focus today on what has been deemed a difficult book to read in the Bible-, the book of Ecclesiastes. What is Ecclesiastes? The name of the book comes from the Greek word for preacher -- *ecclesiastes* with the Hebrew being *koheleth*. This book therefore describes teachings about life and what is important. We may be familiar and know that there is a time for everything under heaven as recorded by Pete Seeger and the Byrds but we often do not take the time to read this 12 chapter book because the first chapter tells us that there is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness for this life we share. Yet in these pages of Ecclesiastes, there is also much of Solomon’s wisdom and incite about what is important for living faithfully to God.

The outline of the book features a chiastic structure which means that the turning point of the book is at its centre. This means that Parts A, B, C are presented and part D is the Centre of the book and then the rest of the book revisits Parts C, B, A and leads to a conclusion (See small handout.)

The author is the Teacher/ Preacher and is the one who leads the congregation and in the case of this book it is King Solomon. Solomon had it all- wisdom, wealth, faith in God and that was considered great at the time. Yet he was left empty and states that there is no meaning in life. He grasped life but his experience was like vapor-hard to hold onto or even insubstantial. To him, life had no meaning. And this is the case with many people today.

The purpose of this book in many ways is to find meaning in what is mundane or hopeless. It seems that the world is drowning in distraction yet are also starving for meaning. Many people are racing and seeking to be fulfilled in what God has placed in earth right here and now. But if we found complete fulfillment here, would we know what we are missing? And secondly would we seek God at all? So our purpose is not to find total fulfillment here in God’s creation under the sun-- but beyond it where we will experience the Son of God, the Spirit and the Creator.

This question of “What it is that we are living for? What gives us meaning? Has been asked repeatedly. In the 1991 Western comedy “City Slickers” starring Billy Crystal and Jack Palance, a group of three friends experience crises in their lives as they reach mid- life. In order to give themselves a boost they go to a dude ranch and participate in a supervised cattle drive. At one point during the ride, Crystal’s character seeks wisdom from Palance’s “Curly” and asks “Do you know what the secret of life is?” Holding up one finger, he responds- One thing. Just

one thing. You stick to that and everything else doesn't mean anything." But what's the one thing? That's what you have to figure out."

This is true for each of us. And like Solomon we might think that what we are doing is 'chasing the wind' for answers. We cannot find what we are looking for and then suddenly when there is something that intrigues us and causes us to think is this the 'one thing', the wind shifts and we are interested in something else.

Wisdom is like this because it is a gift from God and of great value. But is there such a thing as have too much wisdom? What is it that we experience when we learn more about the world's brokenness or experience death of others or even are aware of life with full understanding? What is it that we seek?

Questions of life asked by Solomon in Ecc. 2 are relevant today because what seems to be occurring is that people don't stop. He states that work brought him grief because anything he did was completed by the next person. Or like many people today who cannot walk away from computers or put their phones down- they may not be actively working, but their minds are not resting as they are thinking about what still needs to be done. As Solomon states that without God who can eat or find enjoyment? God is our Provider who gives a things. We need to work diligently for God but also allow time for rest.

We also need to pursue what is significant in life. This could be the work of the philosopher, wisdom itself or even, pleasure, escaping and success. IT is also important to seek common sense living and leaving a legacy. One won't find ultimate meaning under the sun, but only when truly enjoying the gifts of God.

In Ecc. 3 we heard the words about time which include opposites. These are like poles at each end of a line and all the activities are found between these two poles. These statements reflect many of the emotions, actions, and experiences of people as they live in their time. Yet what is it that moves us between these poles? What attracts us causes us to understand that time is ever moving and changing? Without fully understanding all the whys, we can still enjoy God's gifts. Seize the day and this reiterated throughout the rest of the book. When times are good, be happy. Solomon believes in God and the good gifts of joy, love, work and feasting are good gifts from the Creator.

But we also know that not all things are good- there is much work to do; there is judgement and wickedness, and when this occurs time will judge all things. This is noted as we focus on the centre chapters of Ecclesiastes. Ecc. 4 is often shared during wedding ceremonies to illustrate how two people become one and how two are better than one due to the strength and support each receives from their partner. God intends for us all to live in relationship with

each other. But it is the line” a cord of three strands is not quickly broken” which reminds us that the third strand is God who supports and guides and leads us always.

But the centre of the teachings of Solomon in Ecclesiastes is from 5:1-7. These are words of instruction of what to do in times of worship:

- listen! Don't be quick to speak, hasty in your heart
- let your words be few-
- a dream comes when there are many cares and many words mark the speech of a fool

Solomon then writes about the relationship one has with God because of vows made.

- Don't delay to fulfill it. It is better not to make it than to make one and not fulfill it.
- Don't let your mouth lead you into sin. Don't protest to the temple messenger that your vow was done in error

Much dreaming and many words are meaningless-- Therefore fear God.

What has Solomon learned? Most of what we have read is Solomon's failure to show meaning apart from God. Solomon tried to abandon our search to find lasting significance in the here and now. But what he found is that we are called to wholeheartedly revere and trust God our Creator.

We read in Proverbs 9:10 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fearing God invites us to humbly entrust ourselves to the one who sees everything, even if we cannot. Fearing God does not mean to be afraid of God, but to respect Him. We must never be afraid of God because he loves us for it is out of love he created us. It is out of love that he sent Jesus to redeem us and it is out of love that we are called to believe in God- Creator, Christ and Spirit.

Fearing God is not walking around being afraid you're going to give account of all your past sins at the end of your days. If you have confessed your sins God forgives you now- you need not be afraid. Fearing God means learning to live for God as various scriptures talk about what this means.

Be open to God's instructions Ps.25.12 Obeying God's commands Ps 112:1

Trusting in God Ps 115:11 Have hope in God's unfailing love. Ps 33:18

Serve the Lord and rejoice Psalm 2:11 and there are many more; but one must remember that these are choices one makes. When a person profess their faith it means to believe and know that God is with them and that there is nothing to fear.

Solomon writes in Ecc.7: "Consider what God has done; Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future." All things are in God's hands. We just need to love and serve God as we live.

Ecc. 9 "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. This is so that we may live in the most meaningful way we can, which includes fully enjoying the good things God allows us to experience in life- food, drink, clothing, cologne, marriage and all of God's good gifts. Secondly we are to recognize that life is full of opportunities and there is always more work to be done. We are to take advantage of the opportunities God gives us, seeing His wisdom on how to prioritize what we do and using our gifts to truly serve Him.

The Teacher Solomon states, "Fear God and obey his commandments." Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commands". But what are the commandments? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39) Jesus also said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" John 14:23

When we consider The Teacher in Ecclesiastes and that the centre of this book is how we are to fear God as the source of all life, we can set aside the notions that life is meaningless. Life calls each person to make choices for themselves. It is up to us to choose to 'fear God' or to walk away. It is up to us to see that time will pass quicker than we think so it is necessary that we use our time wisely and grow in knowledge. Life may include everything under the sun, but we are to direct our eyes above the sun and worship the One who holds everything in his hands and in his time.

Let us pray

God we thank you that for those who believe and have faith that life has meaning beyond us as individuals as we seek out and touch others in faith and with hope. We pray with hope that people will find meaning in life that goes beyond the race of busyness. We pray O God that you would show us how to live again and enable us to love you for who you are. Amen.