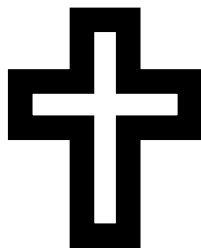


Twelve Lessons
on
Ecclesiastes

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LIFE WITHOUT GOD HOLDS NO UNDERSTANDING – LESSON 1

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

Introduction: The name “Ecclesiastes” is in itself an interesting commentary to this book. In Ecclesiastes 1:1 – Solomon calls himself the “Preacher.” The Hebrew word is *Koheleth* and means an “assembler”, an official speaker who calls an assembly. 1 Kings 8:1, “*Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel.*” The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia* which means a “called out assembly”, and this gives us the title of the book, Ecclesiastes.

Lesson Goals:

1. Understand the background and purpose of Ecclesiastes.
2. Observe life from Solomon’s point of view (“under the sun”), as being mundane and monotonous.
3. To see the utter futility of wisdom apart from God, one of Solomon’s many conclusions concerning life “under the sun.”

Definition of Terms or Phrases:

1. Vanity – Emptiness, worthlessness, or futility. The word vanity as used in the Bible does not mean conceit or a “superiority complex,” like the modern meaning of the term. When applied to persons, it means emptiness or futility of natural human life.
2. Futility – Trifling; unimportance; want of weight or effect; as, to expose the futility of arguments. The quality of producing no valuable effect, or of coming to nothing;

I. THE WRITER – Eccl. 1:1 – The Futility of Writing without God

A. The Timing of his Books

1. Proverbs – He probably wrote Proverbs in the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 4:32). Experience is the best teacher. There are some things that cannot be learned in a book. Therefore, we see that Solomon was endowed with great wisdom, even as a young man.
2. Song of Solomon – He probably wrote this book while in the will of God. The will of God involves more than just salvation. Wisdom is knowing how to apply truth to one’s life.
3. Ecclesiastes – He wrote this book near the end of his life. Here, we see Solomon talking about the vanities of life. This can only be learned through practice.

B. The Truth of his Book

1. Key Verse – 1:2 – “*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*”
2. Key Word – 1:2 – “Vanity” used 38 times
 - a. Vanity – Hebrew – *hebel* – emptiness, transitory, unsatisfactory. Whatever disappears quickly, leaves nothing behind and does not satisfy is vanity. Once described as “whatever is left after you break a soap bubble.”
 - b. Vanity – To say “all is vanity” is to say that nothing has meaning or significance ultimately.
 - c. Illustrate – A mirrored table is called a “vanity” suggesting that any effort to disguise our lack of beauty with cosmetics is an exercise in futility.

C. The Thesis of his Book – “under the sun”

1. Human perspective – He tries to make sense out of life from human wisdom. Thus the truth of 1 Cor 2:14 – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
2. Heaven’s point of view – We need to see life from “above” the sun if we are to make sense out of life.
3. All of the arguments of this Book are from the human perspective. The reader must answer with Heaven’s point of view.

II. THE WORDS – Eccl. 1:1-1 – An underlying thought is the scientific accuracy of the statements about the sun, the wind, and the rivers, evaporation and storm currents (vs. 6-7).

A. Profit – 1:3 – Comparison must be argued. The Futility of Words without God. Earthly wisdom can not comprehend heavenly truth. Job 12:2 – “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.” Never claim that you know everything.

1. The Earth – What has changed about the earth? It is merely a stage with people living and dying, just mere actors with suns for lamps and eternity for a background.

- a. From the Human Perspective, nothing changes.
 - b. From the Heavenly Point of View – Life with God is not “fixed” but “changing” and exciting.
2. The Sun – What does it profit the sun after shining for 12 hours, it only goes down and rises to start over again.
 - a. From the Human Perspective, there is nothing “left over”, nothing is “gained.”
 - b. From the Heavenly Point of View – Life with God is not “gaining” but “giving.” Mark 8:35-36 – *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”*
 - c. The sun warms the earth, seeds sprout, moisture rises, plants grow and bear fruit so the sun’s journey, though spent, is not vanity.
3. The Wind – vs. 6 – All of the going, turning, and whirling continually looks fruitless and vain.
 - a. From the Human Perspective, it is confusion, spinning its wheels, futile and vain.
 - 1) One wind may blow away the hot moist day and make it suddenly turn cool.
 - 2) Another wind may blow in clouds to bring needed moisture.
 - 3) Another wind may blow away the cold damp clouds and allow the sun to warm the land again.
 - b. From the Heavenly Point of View – John 3:8 – Life with God is not “standing still” but moving.
4. The Rivers – vs. 7 – The rivers run down to the ocean, evaporate, fall as rain, and run down to the ocean to repeat the same process.
 - a. From the Human Perspective, it is monotonous and mundane.
 - b. From the Heavenly Point of View – Ex. 14 – Life with God is not “shut up” but opening.
5. The Man – vs. 8 – Humans are never satisfied but are like the Athenians in Paul’s day, spending their time “in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.”
 - a. From the Human Perspective, nothing will ever satisfy. The only people who think something is “new” are the young and those with bad memories.
 - b. From the Heavenly Point of View – Life with God is not “discontent” but fulfilling.

B. Phenomenon – The Believer sees a miracle working God that gives life meaning and hope.

1. God works Miracles in Creation.
 - a. He caused the earth to shake to open the jail for Paul and Silas (Acts 16).
 - b. He held the sun in place so Joshua could finish an important battle (Josh. 10:6-14) and He moved the sun back as a sign to King Hezekiah (Isa. 38:1-8).
 - c. He opened the Red Sea and the Jordan River for Israel (Ex. 14; Joshua 3-4).
 - d. He turned “off” the rain for Elijah (I Kings 17) and then turned it “on” again (James 5:17-18).
 - e. He calmed the wind and the waves for the disciples (Mark 4:35-41).
2. God works Miracles in Conversion – Saul to Paul

III. THE WISDOM – Eccl. 1:12-18 – The Futility of Wisdom with God

A. His Experiments – All of them are contrary to God’s Word. We don’t have to experiment but just believe.

1. Exploration – vs. 13
 - a. As the King of Israel, he had all the resources available to explore pleasure, possessions, and professions. He was able to try it all.
 - b. Result – *“sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.”* After exploring pleasures, possessions, and professions, man is only worn out by them.
2. Escapism – vs. 14 – Some people hide in a bottle; others hide in a job. Still others hide in a family or an individual only to have the bubble of illusion burst. Others hide in religious activity.
 - a. There is such a thing as “death from overwork” and “overwork of the soul.”
 - b. We can only make life harder when we try to escape. Instead of running away from life, we should run to God and let Him make life worth living.
3. Expired – vs. 15 – To the carnal man, the past can’t be changed. But with God, He has the power to straighten out what is twisted and supply what is lacking.

B. His Experience – vs. 16-18 – Solomon gained wisdom and experience. Neither gave him answers but only added to his confusion.

Conclusion: Solomon wanted an explanation. There is a problem with that.

1. First, there are some things that will happen for which there are no explanations and God is not obligated to explain them.
2. Second, God has ordained that His people live by “faith” and not by “sight.”

- a. The Scientist tells us that the world is a closed system and nothing is changed.
 - b. The Historian tells us that life is a closed book and nothing is new.
 - c. The Philosopher tells us that life is a deep problem and nothing is understood.
3. The trouble is that they have not brought God into consideration – Man cannot be Happy or Satisfied without God.