

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 27
Is Life *Really* Worth Living? Book of Ecclesiastes
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Have you ever wondered if life is worth the trouble? Maybe you were going through a difficulty or facing a family crisis and you just wondered is life really worth living. If that has ever been true of you then you will feel right at home in the book of Ecclesiastes. Look with me at Ecclesiastes 1:2-3...

Solomon is the writer of this book and he begins by saying all of life is vanity, that it is empty, and he wonders is it really worth the trouble. Throughout the book he uses four basic arguments which **seem** to say it is not. Let's look at each of these arguments and see if that is really his conclusion.

I. The Monotony of Life

Solomon's first argument concerns the monotony of life. I use the word *monotony* because it refers to *a wearisome sameness*. That's the idea Solomon makes use of in the opening chapters of this book. Look with me at 1:2-11...

As we go through Ecclesiastes we need to keep in mind that Solomon is describing life under the sun from man's perspective. The way man sees life **without God**. He looks to the earth, sun, wind, and water and they seem to be constantly changing but then they don't. We come on the scene, work hard, attempt to make a difference and leave our mark in the world, but then we're gone, replaced by another generation, and the world is still the same. We think about that and wonder, "*What's the use?*"

Solomon's argument is a valid one **if** life under the sun is all there is. If God is left out of the picture then evolution is right. We come and go without making any real difference and the world goes on.

Something else to keep in mind while going through Ecclesiastes is that Solomon uses negative arguments to get us to think about a better alternative. Life without God is empty, it is meaningless, but **God's involvement makes the difference!**

I am not talking about the way church is done, or Christianity is done; I am talking about the personal involvement of the eternal God in our lives.

We can approach church and Christianity the same way we approach the rest of life under the sun and it will end up feeling empty. But when we allow the real God to be real in us life is not a meaningless sameness. It becomes meaningful in every way!

Solomon deals with this subject again in chapters 3-4, and there are especially three points I want to quickly make from them:

First, Instead of a meaningless sameness, because God is in control, everything has purpose. Look at 3:1...

We can look at the sum total of activities in our life and ask, “*What’s the point?*” Or, we can understand that God has a plan and that all these things have been prepared by Him with purpose. Romans 8:28...

Second, Instead of a meaningless NOW, God has put **eternity** in our heart (3:11 NKJV). Regardless of culture or people, man has always looked beyond this world to a world to come. Romans 1:19 says God has put that in us. When we choose to ignore eternity and live for NOW we come up empty, but when we live for eternity, that’s life with purpose!

Third, Instead of a meaningless existence the way we live now makes a difference for eternity. God is going to judge us (3:17). Left to ourselves none of us will pass that judgment, and that’s what makes even our best work seem empty. Romans 3:23 teaches all of us have come up short. That is why Jesus Christ came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

You and I can get caught up in the meaningless sameness of life and how discouraging that can be. But we don’t have to. God makes the difference! He provides purpose for both now and eternity.

II. The Vanity of Wisdom

Another argument used by Solomon in Ecclesiastes has to do with the vanity of wisdom.

The word *vanity* is used 33 times in the book and simply means *empty* or *meaningless*. *Wisdom* is also an often used word, being used 28 times. It is a subject Solomon was well acquainted with. He had God-given wisdom at his disposal, and so do we according to James 1:5. But God-given wisdom is not the subject of this argument. Solomon is referring to man's wisdom. The very best we can come up with apart from God. Look at 1:16-18...

Solomon says increased knowledge only increases sorrow. Since the beginning of recorded history, think of all that man has sought to know and understand, and how little most of it has accomplished. You and I live in a time when knowledge has rapidly expanded. So much knowledge has been gained in a very short period of time, and yet children are killing children in our schools because life seems empty. Should we be surprised?

The late Stephen Jay Gould, professor of science at Harvard University, in his book, Wonderful Life, concludes that we have no reason or purpose for being here. With that kind of wisdom, no wonder life seems meaningless! 2 Timothy 3:7, I think, describes our time quite well, we are "*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*"

If God is not part of our seeking then we're never going to find. God's involvement in our search for understanding makes the difference! In chapters 7-8 Solomon says God's involvement makes life better, it helps us see life clearer, and it helps us face life stronger. Look at 7:29...

(Romans 1:22, "*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*")

Also look at 8:12-13...

That's why Proverbs 1:7 teaches, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*"

III. The Futility of Wealth

A third argument of Solomon concerns the futility of wealth. Look with me at 2:1-11...

Pleasure, prosperity, and possessions; those three make up the wealth that man pursues. Look at any time in history and that's what you will find. Look

at our own society and you'll find we're consumed by them. And if we're honest, you and I would have to admit that much of our lives are as well.

Solomon did and gained all that he could. He did more, built more, and gained more than anyone else alive, and concluded it was all empty. Many others have concluded the same. Over the years newspapers and magazines have reported the stories of successful people who've said that with all their getting they were left empty.

Pleasure, prosperity, and processions don't give real meaning and purpose to life. Remember the story Jesus told in Luke 12 of the rich farmer? He lived to gain wealth and thought he could finish out life satisfied but God called him a fool. In Mark 8:36 Jesus asks, "*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?*" Jesus was teaching the same thing as Solomon. We can have more than anyone else in the world, but if that's all we have, and if that's all there is to our life then we've got nothing. Look at 6:1-4...

Solomon is saying the pleasures, prosperity, and processions that come with life are the gift of God, if you have them enjoy them, but we cannot enjoy them apart from the God who gives them. Wealth by itself leaves us empty; God's involvement makes the difference!

IV. The Certainty of Death

The final argument of Solomon in Ecclesiastes concerns the certainty of death. Look at 2:12-23...

Solomon is talking about death in these verses, the one event that strikes us all. It doesn't matter who we are, what we've done, how we live, or where we live, death comes to us all. And when it does, haven't you wondered, "*If this is what we have to look forward to, what's the point?*" And Solomon adds to this the thought that all we gain is just given to another, which just seems to add despair upon despair. As a result, many in our world have adopted the philosophy, "*Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die!*" Look at 9:3-6...

If we honestly believe the only hope we have is while we're still living then we'll do nothing to prepare for death. As Solomon says, a living dog is better than a dead lion. **But death still comes!**

I was asked to visit a man who was dieing of cancer. For months I visited him and it was frustrating because he never wanted to talk about death. He wasn't going to die; he was going to beat it! One day I got a call from the hospital, he wanted me to come right away because he was going to die. When I got there we immediately talked about what Jesus did for him. Without hesitation he asked Jesus to be his Savior. By the time I got home the hospital had called again to say he had died. When I later shared what happened with his son and daughter-in-law, it brought tears of joy to their eyes because the news brought them hope in death. Without God there is no hope in life or death, but with Him there is hope in both!

I like the way the Apostle Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57...

Death can be an enemy but it doesn't have to be the victor, when Jesus went to the cross He died for sin and death, and when He rose from the grave He became the victor over both!

Let's face it, at one time or another we all grapple with the question, "*Is life really worth living?*" We look at the monotony of life, the vanity of man's wisdom, the futility of wealth, the certainty of death and conclude it isn't. For those who reach that settled conclusion life is indeed sad. But there is another, a better alternative. We can invite the real, the personal eternal God into our lives and He will make all the difference! 1 John 5:12 teaches, "*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*"

So how does Solomon conclude the book of Ecclesiastes? Look at 12:13-14...

Solomon concludes with 3 thoughts that enable us to enjoy life at its best:

1. Fear God – recognize and receive Him into your life.
2. Keep His commandments. They are His instructions for living. They are not given to keep us from enjoying life but to get the most out of life.
3. Understand God holds us accountable. When we believe this it purifies us and makes life better.

Yes, life without God is meaningless, but life **with God** is life at its best!