

Confessions of an Honest Man

6.21.26

Message 1

So What?

Intro. to Ecclesiastes

A. The question of “Why” is one of the most powerful questions we can ask.

1. When we ask “why” in medicine, we find healing and solutions.
2. When we ask “why” about behavior, we often experience wholeness, awareness, and growth.
3. When we ask, “why” about a problem, we invent, we create, we build, we prosper.
4. When a child starts asking why, they are exploring newfound limitations and seeking answers.
5. When a Christian asks God why, they are engaging in a dialogue that creates intimacy and a relationship between the created and the Creator.
6. “Why” is a question of searching, working, exploring, fixing, and understanding. Asking “why” is a sign that we are still alive.

B. The most dangerous question is not, why, but “So what?”

When a person stops asking why and starts responding with “so what”, we have entered new territory.

This is a sign of someone giving up.

A person who has tried, came back empty, and doesn't care anymore.

A person who has lost or is losing hope.

A person who sees no future purpose or reason for living.

So what? Who cares? Doesn't matter.

C. Solomon, or the writer of Ecclesiastes, used a specific word to describe this.

Hebrew: “Hevel”

Futile (CSB)

Vanity (KJV)

Meaningless (NLT)

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11 (NLT)

These are the words of the Teacher, King David’s son, who ruled in Jerusalem.

Everything Is Meaningless

²“Everything is meaningless,” says the Teacher, “completely meaningless!”

³What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? ⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. ⁵The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. ⁶The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. ⁷Rivers 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. ⁸Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

⁹History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. ¹⁰Sometimes people say, “Here is something new!” But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. ¹¹We don’t remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

Why Read Ecclesiastes?

A. Ecclesiastes can be read a couple of different ways.

1. It is either an extremely pessimistic book.
2. It can also be read as a hopeful book.
3. Sometimes it depends on what kind of mood your end.
4. We must read it, as it is equally inspired as every other part of Scripture.

B. Reading Ecclesiastes isn’t easy.

1. In fact, it isn’t supposed to be easy.
 - a. Ecclesiastes is written as a type of poetry, or wisdom literature.

b. It explores life without answering the questions.

2. Wisdom and poetry often expose the flaws, but don't give us a really clear answer.

a. It's like having a building inspector review a building, tell you it's wrong, and then walk away.

b. Or a doctor saying, "You're sick," and then leaving the room.

c. You know something is broken, but you have no idea how to fix it.

3. So you set off to figure out how to fix what you think is broken.

You leave on a worldwide tour, exploring everything, everywhere.

You spare no expense.

You return home, and your friends ask you what did you learn, you respond:

Meaningless.

Nothing matters.

Hevel.

C. A danger of Ecclesiastes is that we too often read it, throw our hands up, and give up.

This makes sense. If the smartest, richest, wisest man can't figure it out, how is a dummy like me going to get it right?

If it is all meaningless, empty, vanity, then why fight it?

It is possible to read Ecclesiastes or skim it and pay no attention to the fact that what Solomon says isn't wrong; it is incomplete.

D. Solomon isn't wrong.

1. Life is Hevel.

2. Work is Hevel.

3. Being wise is Hevel.

4. Being a fool is Hevel.

5. Everything is meaningless IF it isn't connected to God.

6. This is why Christians need to read Ecclesiastes.

Why does the Christian need to read Ecclesiastes?

A. Ecclesiastes refuses to make life predictable.

1. All of us want life to be predictable.
2. We want the good things to stay the same.
3. We want to feel in control of our future while remaining anchored in the present.
4. We want our lives to matter.

B. Ecclesiastes reminds us of our limitations.

1. It reminds us that we are not God.
2. And it reminds us that our lives are outside of our control.
3. Why Ecclesiastes?

C. Christians need Ecclesiastes when:

1. When we cry out to God, wondering when the miracle will come
2. When the Christian questions God's goodness because the craziness gets crazier, because the kids are falling away, because the spouse is absent...because the surgery doesn't get canceled...the miracle doesn't come through.
3. When the righteous suffer, and the wicked are promoted.
4. When godly couples long for children and have none, but the wicked produce unwanted children by the dozen...
5. When the rich accumulate more, while the hardworking never get ahead.
6. When it seems that God is silent, abandoning us to our own devices, THAT is when men and women read the Wisdom literature.
7. That is when books like Ecclesiastes get written.

D. Ecclesiastes is the opposite of the books we write today.

1. We read books by successful people.
2. They tell of their wins, and how you can too
3. Or we read biographies about great people and think, I can never do that.

4. We read of other people's successes and wonder why I'm so broken.

E. Ecclesiastes is the book that an honest person would write.

1. When we have done everything, studied everything, explored everything, and tried everything, that is when we throw up our hands and proclaim:

2. Meaningless, futile, vanity.

3. Kids don't write or read Ecclesiastes; adults do.

F. In fact, the writer is likely Solomon, and he's writing it as an old man with lots of experience.

1. Solomon had it all and lost.

2. Solomon did it all, and nothing mattered.

3. Solomon started his life well, but by the time he finished, he had drifted so far off course that he was far from God.

4. How?

Solomon sought the wrong gain.

Ecclesiastes 1:3 (CSB)

³What does a person gain for all his efforts

that he labors at under the sun?

A. Gain is a financial term.

1. It's the profit or the surplus.

2. It's what is left over after the work or investment.

B. Gain is good.

1. We expect to have a paycheck at the end of the week.

2. We expect that hard work pays off.

3. We expect that when we invest in relationships, we will reap the benefits.

C. Solomon invested himself in searching for everything.

1. As we will see, he withheld nothing from himself.

- a. He sought to gain pleasure, money, experience, and knowledge.
- b. What did he gain?

2. Nothing.

3. The investment was meaningless.

D. Have you ever poured your heart into something and it failed?

1. Or you bought the thing and it disappointed?
2. Or you invested in something and it cost you?
3. This is what Solomon experienced.

When Everything is wearisome.

A. Notice verse 8:

Ecclesiastes 1:8 (CSB)

⁸ All things are wearisome,
more than anyone can say.
The eye is not satisfied by seeing
or the ear filled with hearing.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 (NLT)

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.

B. Everywhere I go, the word weary comes up.

1. People are weary.
2. Weary is not just tired, but a strong desire to give up and quit.
3. And the Preacher of Ecclesiastes declares that everything makes him want to give up and quit, because everything is meaningless.
4. Everything is never enough.

5. Everything under the sun, that is.

C. Everything is wearisome when separated from God.

1. Apart from God, there is no reason, no purpose, no meaning.
2. Apart from God, the things that should give you pleasure or fulfillment will be empty.
3. Apart from God, there is no achievement, no financial benchmark, no promotion, nothing that will satisfy us.

D. But connected to God:

1. Even trivial pursuits bring us joy.
2. Even the most ordinary jobs become meaningful.
3. Heartache, disaster, difficulty, and everything else become opportunities to see God's hand and His glory.

Solomon explored without God as a guide.

A. This will come up a lot in this series.

1. Solomon had incredible encounters with God.
2. But he refused to let those encounters shape and form him.
3. The greatest influence in his life was not God, but the women who led him astray.

B. When we pursue gain without God, we find it to be bankrupt and vain.

1. May I suggest that many of us in the room, especially men, are pursuing gain and God separately?
2. We pursue gain with God at church, at a quiet time in the morning, or a bible study.
3. Then we pursue another form of gain, what Solomon calls "under the sun", the rest of the time.
4. When we push God into a corner of our lives, we find that only that corner gets blessed.

C. What if what we need is not a change of situation but a deeper relationship with God?

1. What if I told you that a bigger paycheck won't fix you?

2. That a new stage of life won't heal you?
3. That a change of jobs won't satisfy you?
4. That a new spouse will still disappoint you?
5. That someone else's life would still leave you without meaning?

D. **The only One who will fix you, heal you, satisfy you, and give you meaning is Jesus!**

1. Solomon wasn't wrong.
2. Life under the sun is meaningless.
3. The only way to find meaning is when we do life with Jesus.

The End is the Beginning

A. Let me jump ahead to the end of Ecclesiastes.

1. To be honest, we don't even know if Solomon wrote this part.
2. It might have been the scribe adding this at the end to make sure we knew what Solomon, the Preacher, didn't.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (CSB)

¹³ When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity.

B. After all of this, when everything has been heard, we must all "fear God and obey Him."

1. This is the only source of meaning.
2. The Poet Henry David Thoreau sounds a bit like Solomon:
"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation."
3. It's true! Most men are quietly desperate for something but they don't know what.

C. But listen to the words of Jesus:

1. Jesus cried out, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

2. Jesus offers what Solomon could not find.
3. Jesus gives what the Poet said we needed.
4. Jesus gives us what we truly need.

D. What we need has already been done by Jesus!

1. Jesus took “the vanity of all these vanities into the Holy of Holies...”¹
2. Jesus makes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes complete.
3. Man’s view of life is meaningless but GOD!

What about Jesus?

- Jesus doesn’t make life predictable; He makes it bearable.
- Jesus doesn’t make life painless; He makes it meaningful.
- Jesus doesn’t stand before us, like Solomon, and say “Who cares?”
- Jesus stands before us with His arms open wide and declares, “Come to me!!!”
- Jesus cares. Jesus knows everything under the Son. Jesus proclaims that He will give us rest from our striving and searching.
- Jesus says while we were still sinners, He died for us.
- Jesus says that God so loved the world...Everything under the sun.

Response

A. This morning if you, you were being honest, you would say you have been trying to do life by yourself, apart from God, and you are ready to give your life to Him, I want to pray for you specifically.

B. This morning, if you were honest, you would say feel weighed down by the cares of the world, I want to invite you to spend some time with Jesus.

C. If you were honest, and you have focused on family, career, money, and pleasure and found all of them disappointing, frustrating, and unsatisfying, I want to invite you to come to Jesus.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 31. I editing slightly to make a statement instead of Ryken’s question.

