

SEPTEMBER 2

Ecclesiastes 1-3

After reading Job you probably didn't think things could get worse. But they can and they did, and we hear it from the mouth of King Solomon, the person God said was the wisest man who ever lived.

While Job has a great positive lesson, Ecclesiastes has a great negative warning. There are similarities between these two men and the despair they describe, and at times, they sound the same; but they couldn't be greater opposites. Job suffered because he was righteous. Solomon suffered because he became unrighteous. Job's trouble came from outside him. Solomon's trouble came from within. Job is used by God as an example of a godly man desperately holding on to what he knew was true of God, and he was saved from personal ruin. Solomon is offered as an example of what happens to a godly man who lets go of what he knows is true of God and is then ruined. In this book we see what can become of a person who loves God and decides to ignore Him. How low can a person sink? What is notable here is that Solomon doesn't mention his idolatry. In my mind, that means that it hadn't occurred yet. I doubt that Solomon wrote anything after he became a server of pagan gods. What we see in Ecclesiastes is not how low one could go, but we see how a believer can progressively destroy his life.

Just like in Job, we know the background of what is happening here. Having read Kings, we know that Solomon ignored the warnings in the Word and did everything God said a king was not supposed to do. Read Deuteronomy 17:15-20. I doubt that Solomon wrote his own copy of the law and read it every day. God is not mocked, even by those He loves. If a man sows to the wind, he will reap the whirlwind. Solomon became like the seed planted among thorns. He became choked by stuff and drifted away from God. To hear that Solomon learned that life on earth is senseless should make sense to us. Just to put this in perspective and understand that this is still possible for any believer or disciple, look at what Paul wrote to the Romans.

Romans 8:12 *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*
¹³*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Since Paul is warning believers, you realize the issue is not loss of salvation, but damage of your mind and heart on earth. We can ruin it all if we try, and many believers today are ruining their lives for Christ. They are distant from the Word, absent from the harvest and they have lost their love and gratefulness to Jesus. They are lost on earth and living to die. Solomon "died," and God will show us how it happened, so that we can "live."

Ecclesiastes 1

Vs. 1-2 This is Solomon's message in the book. At this point you could stop reading, but it is worth going on to see how Solomon fell into the trap and to see his regret.

Vs. 3-11 It is actually amazing that Solomon grasped this. Many people never see that a life without God, just lived on this earth, is meaningless. But realize that Solomon is not teaching us as a warning, he is expressing his view of life. God is allowing us to see the heart of this once godly, but now hollow, man.

I'm going to suggest a progress in Solomon's decline to despair. Notice that he relies on his wisdom and position. He does not seek God to understand life and circumstances. All the godly kings sought God when they were following Him. Because Solomon was so smart, he sought to understand life without God. The poorest person in the world might not be that foolish. The simplest believer in Christ, in the most poverty stricken place on earth, would be richer and wiser

than Solomon; because he would begin with Christ to understand life on earth and be dependent on the Word and the Spirit.

What we're looking for in this section is Solomon's description of what he did, and his own conclusion about what he did. This section shows a progression of looking into one thing and then looking into another, until Solomon finally hit bottom. The "bottom" will be total despair, hopelessness. After writing this book, Solomon broke through the bottom and fell into horrible idolatry.

Vs. 12-15 Trying to understand human life and activity by wisdom. Notice the words *applied*, *seek*, and *search*. I think this is Solomon's first step. It was a step without God.

Notice in v. 13 what Solomon did and what he learned.

V. 14 is his conclusion regarding this phase of his study. Here, Solomon's conclusion is marked by the word *vanity* (vapor or breath) and a descriptive phrase, *striving after wind*. Now look for the next.

Vs. 16-18 Can you see what he applied his heart to here? Can you understand how this is different than the thing he tried to find out in 12-15?

Notice at the end of v. 17 that Solomon says that this endeavor was as meaningful as chasing after wind. Solomon is slowly progressing to the "dark side."

Ecclesiastes 2

Vs. 1-11 This was a big phase of Solomon's "study" and it involved a lot of his life. How would you title this?

V. 1 Notice what Solomon applied his heart to and how he says this endeavor was *vanity* (meaningless, a vapor). It is important to note that here he says that giving himself to *pleasure* was vanity. Later in these verses he will say that what he found out was vanity too.

After Solomon built the temple, his "goal" in life was fulfilled. It seems that all of his godliness was aimed at building the temple and fulfilling his father's dream. I don't think Solomon had his own godly desires, so he began to build and try to fill the void. He followed his dreams. He had everything and everything ruined him. The size of his harem was not only a violation of Deuteronomy 17, but it was obscene and excessive. He was out of control. But he looked godly; he had a silver tongue and he paid the bills. Why disagree with him?

V. 11 Notice that he saw all that his hand had done. Compare this with Job 31:24-28, "*If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, ²⁵if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, ²⁶if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, ²⁷and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, ²⁸this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.*" It was happening to Solomon and no one stepped in his way.

Vs. 12-19 This seems to be the same thing Solomon sought as in 1:16-18. It seems like a way of stopping, after you've done something and trying to make sense of life. When he tried to make sense of life in 1:16-18, it led him to seek a meaning in life through pleasure and accomplishment. Here, it led him into a deeper evaluation of the value of life and wisdom, and the result is that Solomon hated his life. This is like a mid-life crisis on steroids. And again, there is no mention of seeking God.

Vs. 20-23 Solomon gave into despair. This means giving up the hope that there is a purpose to life. At this point, Solomon is ready for the "dark side" and for stepping into idolatry with his wild women.

V. 21 Notice Solomon's comment here. Giving into despair was not only vanity, but a great evil. I think this was the end of the road for Solomon. If you conclude, as Solomon did, that there is

no lasting contribution in life, if there is no hope and no purpose, you have given yourself up to despair and living as you please. Now he was ready for anything worse that came along. At this point, Solomon is not wise, but incredibly bitter in his perception of life. Solomon had eyes only for himself and his incredible wisdom, not for God or God's redemptive purpose in the world. And look at what that did to him. I see this same thing in believers who are not in the harvest, making a comfortable life on earth.

Vs. 24-26 This is totally cynical, but interestingly, at the end of this tirade he says this observation on life is pretty meaningless too. Multiplying everything by zero (hopelessness) always gives you the same result.

Ecclesiastes 3

Vs. 1-8 The view of life from "hopeless heights." Simon and Garfunkel made a song out of this, and I didn't like it either.

Vs. 9-13 Based on the previous verses, this is what Solomon will say, over and over, is the point of life and as much as we should expect. For many people, this is enough.

V. 11 Solomon's observation that God has put eternity in our hearts was great, but because he didn't seek God, it was just a frustration to him. This is true of believers too. To know the truth and know there is something beckoning to us, and to not pursue it, makes for a frustrating life. This is why we are to follow Christ in the harvest, not just stand here in life or sit in church.

Vs. 14-22 As you read this section you'll notice that it sounds like some of the things Job said. This is worse than Job, simply because of the hopelessness. Job never gave up hope. He still thought that his Redeemer lived and that he would be vindicated in what he held to. Solomon gave up.

So what lessons do you get out of this? What does the Spirit say to you? I definitely appreciate God's mercy and love in giving us understanding of what is happening on this earth, and in the world of the spiritual. I'm thankful that our lives are defined by Christ and His love for us, and I'm grateful that we have a mission in life. We know what will last, and it is for the glory of God and not for us. Now, of course, we could deny all of this like Solomon did. Solomon could have lived for the redemptive purpose of God. God spoke to Solomon twice and probably would have spoken to him more if Solomon had asked, if he had sought God. The lasting value of our lives on earth is in the harvest, working with our Lord and His church to bear much fruit, glorifying the Father and so proving we are His disciples. And because of the resurrection we know that we will be raised and live with Christ forever. This earth is just a temporary, tragic prelude to the future. Here we work and bear Christ's suffering as we reach the lost and equip others to continue and make disciples. There we will rejoice with the redeemed and bear the glory of our Savior.

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Vs. 1-2 This is a statement of Paul's office in life, but actually this is for all of us. We have been offered the opportunity of working together with God as His ambassadors. The idea of not receiving *the grace of God in vain*, I think, involves fruitlessness, a life that doesn't grow in Christ and reproduce in reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. I think we're seeing this in Solomon. The quote in v. 2 comes from Isaiah 49:8. If you read Isaiah 49 you will find a call to Israel to follow and be a light to the nations. They will fulfill their destiny. Although Solomon lived before Isaiah wrote, there was plenty in the Word to have enabled Solomon to live for the promise of God and the redemption of mankind. The key is that he never obeyed those words written to the king in Deuteronomy 17.

How do you *receive the grace of God in vain*? I think it is receiving salvation, then living for yourself, and not declaring your praise of God to the lost. The Corinthian church was becoming religiously lost in itself. *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* (Romans 7:4)

Vs. 3-10 This was Paul's commendation showing he was a servant of Christ. This is like a visual or an example of what Jesus told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul lived like a disciple is called to live in the harvest. Notice too that this is similar to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* Paul was a model of both suffering for Christ and fruitfulness in following. He loved Christ and endured anything to show that love. What a guy to model.

Vs. 11-13 The conflict in Corinth is never out of view. Paul was their spiritual father (led them to Christ) pleading to them as his children. What an appeal. The ultimate end of what he was seeking is that they would love and follow Christ.

Psalm 46

I think this was written after the Lord destroyed the Assyrian army that came to threaten Jerusalem when Hezekiah was the king. This took place in 2 Kings 18 & 19.

Vs. 1 This is the declaration of faith and confidence in the Lord.

Vs. 2-3 This is the ultimate threat. The sea was like a devouring monster, relentless and untamable, and it was able to swallow the mountains.

Vs. 4-5 But on God's mountain, in Jerusalem, there is a supernatural calm. The stream brings an intoxicating gladness and peace. In confidence they know that God will answer in the morning after a night of rest.

Vs. 6-7 God made Assyria totter when the Assyrians woke the next morning and found 185,000 soldiers had died in their sleep.

Vs. 8-9 The people of Jerusalem went out to the Assyrian camp, and it was full of supplies and wagons and chariots. Apparently they used some of this stuff to burn in order to keep warm. At the end of the Tribulation and extending into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, the people in and around Jerusalem will be doing this again. *Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years,¹⁰ so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord God.*

(Ezekiel 39:9-10)

Vs. 10-11 The people "trapped" in Jerusalem with Hezekiah didn't know what the Lord was doing or why He would allow Assyria to attack them. They were in distress and cried out and waited. God rescued them and gave them a message and song. God is telling us too, that we are to seek His shelter and not to fear as we wait for Him.

Proverbs 22:15

Amen, but remember, you'll get arrested in Sweden if you do this.