

SEPTEMBER 3

Ecclesiastes 4-6

Job and Solomon were both rich men who worked hard in life. It would be easier to hear Job say what Solomon is about to say, since Job lost everything. As Solomon writes this he is still amazingly rich. It seems that everything Solomon says lacks any redemptive perspective in life and comes from the attitude that a man, himself, makes his life. Just like in Job, there is an abundance of truth here, but it is truth about life when you have lost the closeness to the Lord. Solomon's focus is on accomplishment on earth and lasting value. We know this earth must pass away, and only what is done for the Lord in the redemption and rescue of people will last or have meaning.

By now you know what to do to keep your interest sharp. Look for recurring words and phrases, and highlight or underline them.

Ecclesiastes 4

This chapter seems to focus on the foolishness of being alone.

Vs. 1-3 This definitely sounds like Job. As Solomon looked outside of Israel (I hope it was outside of Israel), he saw oppression that could not be remedied. In his mind, it was better for the oppressed never to have been born. He didn't know about the church in communist China. If the rule of Solomon had been about the glory of God and not the glory of Solomon, he might have brought the testimony of God's truth and holiness to others and the leaders of other nations.

Vs. 4-6 Verse 6 appears to be the godly goal, but what is said in v. 4 seems to be said from a bitter heart. Maybe some of what Solomon built came from wanting to be envied by other nations.

Vs. 7-8 Solomon appears to have had this work ethic, but without working for the Lord, one wonders for whom the work is done. That ought to be a message to us as believers. A disciple in the harvest lives knowing the answer to this.

Vs. 9-12 I wonder if Solomon said this from regret. I think that ultimately, Solomon was a lonely man without real friends. He apparently didn't have anyone with the guts to tell him he was wrong. Also, I think he was love starved. God designed that a man should have one wife to complete him. Solomon, the man who had 1000 wives, was really alone on earth and desperately incomplete.

Vs. 13-16 This story seems to describe the new king as alone, not accepted and not regarded for his achievements. This wasn't completely autobiographical, but the feelings might have been the same.

Ecclesiastes 5

Vs. 1-7 This seems to say that if you make God mad at you by not fulfilling the promises you have made to Him, He will make your accomplishments meaningless and your life pointless. I wonder if Solomon felt guilty for having fallen so far from those early days. It is hard to imagine that the guy who prayed that prayer at the dedication of the temple later wrote these words.

Vs. 8-9 Rulers will take the fruit of your toil.

Vs. 10-17 Ruin through the love of money and greed. Much of this sounds like Job, particularly v. 15; and much of it seems like it could be autobiographical, Solomon reflecting on his own life.

Vs. 18-20 This is the only point in life as Solomon saw it. Ironically, from everything Solomon says, I don't think he enjoyed this simple life. I think he was miserable. I wonder if he wished he could have had something like what he described here.

Since Solomon had wandered from God and was experiencing a lot of darkness of heart, these words have no eternal perspective. In a sense, this is Solomon saying, "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." I have read a commentator who said the statement in verses 18-20 is actually a true statement coming from God, but I would say this is only, kind of, true in the sense that a simpler life is better and probably reflects what God intended life to be had there been no fall.

But knowing the rescue that God is making on earth, (and Solomon should have known God's plan of redemption), there is so much more to life. In a sense, this could be seen in what Paul says about godliness with contentment; but as a disciple, Paul's life was filled with meaning and activity because of the harvest and following Christ. IF this statement can be connected to living to follow Christ in the harvest, I'm all for it.

Ecclesiastes 6

Vs. 1-6 This seems to be autobiographical. Solomon might have already seen that his son Rehoboam would be a fool. We already know from chapter 1 that Solomon gave himself to pleasure and didn't enjoy it. Not only that, with all the wives Solomon had, you'd think he would have had more children than Rehoboam; but we never hear of them. We do know that Solomon later sacrificed/offered children (babies) to Molech. They would have been his own children, for that "offering" to have been meaningful.

Vs. 7-9 Without someone to pass things on to, Solomon says that our work is only for our own personal appetites. This is a good reason to invest our lives in reaching the lost and strengthening one another to make disciples, who make disciples. Our appetites need to conform to God's purposes and Word.

Vs. 10-12 This is why the existential philosophers love Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes. This is a great description of life on earth without God.

In reading this, we need to remember that what happened to Solomon could happen to any of us. Solomon was "destroyed" spiritually by living in the flesh and drifting from God. Here is what Paul said regarding former disciples. *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* (Phil. 3:18-21)

The best defense is a good offense. Love Christ for His salvation and forgiveness; follow Him in the harvest. Stay in the Word, growing in the Lord; and make disciples, who make disciples. And did I mention staying in the Word every day? Many of us start well, but living on this planet has an eroding effect on our vision. Only love for Jesus can keep us alive. And that love for Jesus is kept alive by being in the Word daily and following in the harvest.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:7

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

So who is Paul referring to here? Is he talking about marriage? I think Paul is talking about the Jewish super-apostles and other frauds the Corinthians had in their group. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul told them, *For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.* This is a good general principle, but here I think Paul is telling the Corinthians to distance themselves from those who said they were believers, but were not believers, or those who were believers, but were a problem to unity.

These factitious people were also setting the people against Paul. Here is what Paul says in Romans 16:17, *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* Why Paul needed to appeal to the church in Rome and why he needed to say this to the Corinthians is that we resist doing this to those who are in the church, who keep the church from its mission by criticism and stubbornness. Our misguided thoughts of tolerance and love for one another need to be in conformity with the Word and to following Christ in the harvest.

These verses (vs. 16-18) are from Isaiah and Ezekiel and they have a point. We cannot be close to God and have Him reveal Himself to us if we are intimately mixed with those who have no love for Christ in conformity to the Word. Following the Lord has to be our first passion, and everyone opposed to Him and His Word cannot be in the innermost place in our hearts.

2 Corinthians 7:1-7

V. 1 Which promises are those? The ones Paul has just quoted from the Old Testament. Seeking the promises here will only make sense to the person who loves Christ. To all others it will sound too extreme or theoretical. This verse also sounds like Romans 12:1-2, offering themselves back to Christ.

Vs. 2-4 Paul is coming full circle to chapter 1. In this long explanation of his distress that began in 2:14, Paul is now making his final appeal to the Corinthians to accept him and his coworkers because of their sincerity and love. All of this is written because of his love and heart for the Corinthians. Notice that v. 2 is full of defense of his ministry among them, and everything else is a testimony of his love for them. Paul had the heart of a shepherd and maker of disciples.

Vs. 5-7 This continues the narrative from 2:13. Paul was waiting for Titus. He was anxious about the impact of the letter he sent with Titus. When Titus found Paul, he told him that the majority of the people saw what was happening and had tender hearts toward Paul. Notice all the mentions of afflictions and comfort. This all goes back to the first chapter of this letter.

One of the toils in the harvest is seeking to move believers back into the arena of following Christ in the harvest. This is discipleship too. It's not easy to do this when people have redefined Christianity as what they like to do and is comfortable for them. The goal suggests the strategy. They need to be in the Word every day; they need to fall back in love with Christ who saved them, and they need to give themselves to Him, following Him in the harvest. These are the basics of what it means to belong to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 47

I think this was written in the afterglow of God saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

Vs. 1-4 When God destroyed the Assyrian army, they had already ransacked many countries and cities. The entire world sat up and took notice of Jerusalem and Yahweh. It says that nations sent gifts to Hezekiah, because they were so thankful that God had humbled the Assyrians. (2 Chron. 32:23)

Vs. 5-7 This is a call for the nations, not just to rejoice, but to praise the God who did it, the King of all nations.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that in v. 9 the people of all nations gather as if they belonged to the promise of Abraham. Actually the promise of Abraham is a promise of redemption to all mankind. Through Abraham's seed, Jesus, all nations would be blessed.

This seems like a simple song of praise in worship. I wonder if the sons of Korah understood that God was working in the world and in Israel to bring salvation and redemption to all of lost humanity. If you miss this part, what really is the difference between Solomon dedicating the temple and Solomon writing Ecclesiastes? I'm so thankful that we are defined by Jesus and not by church or worship from any culture, or by perceived blessing. We follow Jesus as His disciples in the harvest.

Proverbs 22:16

Either on earth or after, Amen.