

got wisdom? Lesson 2

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

A good place to begin the study of Ecclesiastes is with a reminder of who Solomon was according to scripture (1 Kings 1-11) and who he was viewed as by others (2 Chron 9:3-7). Understanding the advantages that his role as King of Israel afforded Him, we understand how and why he writes this epilogue as “the preacher” to the masses (Vs. 1-2).

Solomon’s quest is to discern the purpose of life. Essentially his concern or goal is the answer to why we exist and what it means to be human. Solomon rightly concludes that we can only understand our purpose in life; what it means to be human, in light of who God is. He asserts that God as sovereign creator, sustainer, and judge of all should shape how we live.

It appears that he does not want to appeal to God to find meaning in life; he tries to find it in human strength, which when pursued from an “under the sun” perspective, is illusive at best. Finding them is like trying to catch the wind, “a striving after the wind” (1:14). If one does not look at life from God’s perspective, then life is like a vapor. It is fleeting and futile, but this is not where Ecclesiastes ends.

He is presenting a challenge that the rest of this writing seeks to answer, and one that we may have asked ourselves, “What am I really working for” (1:3)? For some this laborious life is profitable. Retirement, stability, recreation, social fulfillment, etc. are notable desires. But when we answer Solomon’s question, we realize that he’s considering something much simpler than life in this world.

He asserts that if we seek to find usefulness, worth, benefit, gains, or some sort of return from a life that comes and then is gone where is it (1:4-7)? The truth is, that as much as we can pay it forward to coming generations, this cyclical nature of life, in time, presents us with no real substantial return.

To this point, it seems that the underlying question of eternal existence and or eternal reward is considered. It begs to ask the question; Is there something that exists beyond this world that will convey a return for what I have done on this earth (Mt 5:12; Lk 6:23; 1 Cor 3:11-15, 15:58)? The challenge is to discover that this life is not all that there is to our existence!

Again, Solomon uses the term “all things” to speak to the void, the emptiness, and non-return on our investment in the labors of this world (1:8). As we participate in labor, life, death, and the observance of the natural world we live in, it creates a “weariness” in that they appear to perpetually move forward without stoppage.

They are not hindered by our presence, our labors, or our participation as they have existed before us, with us, and they will continue to exist after we have departed. The human mind and language can barely put into words a description of such an endless process. We see and hear these events our whole life, yet nothing really changes or is new, so the process marches forward as it always has.

Because of this, Solomon concludes that in all reality there is truly nothing that is “new under the sun”, that is, new in this realm of life according to the existence of time (1:9). The only “new” that exists in the world of labor, life, death, and nature is found within the individual who now finds him or herself participating in what we know as life.

While there may be nothing new under the sun according to this world; thankfully the followers of Jesus, those born again by God’s Spirit, don’t live under the sun in that sense. Our life is filled with new things, that we all can embrace and live into, to find reward in this life and in the life to come (Mt 6:10, 26:28; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:24).

Of course, there are new things, i.e., inventions, sports, scientific and technological advancements, but this is not what Solomon is referring to (1:10-11). Don’t miss the point. The ages before us were filled with the exact same toil of labor, life, death, and natural occurrences. People have always lived and done these things in the human experience, to no earthly avail.

He is still looking to answer the question of Vs. 3. What benefit is it to man to live and labor through this life only to end up with the natural reality of death and nothing to show afterward for his efforts (Mt 6:20)? Our goal should be to encounter this life as it comes to us but live it unto a reality that continues beyond our natural experience (Phil 3:1-11).

As we read Ecclesiastes in the context of the rest of Scripture, we are reminded that who we are as people is defined by who God is and are made in His image (Gen 1:27). Therefore, to know ourselves we must know God. Being divine image bearers means that we are made to be in relationship and communion with Him as the ultimate aim and end all to this life.

THE TAKE HOME:

1. Why will man never find happiness or meaning apart from God?
2. What is the relevance of the book of Ecclesiastes to your generation? How could you help the successional generations grasp the same relevance?
3. What is the important lesson we learn when comparing Ecclesiastes 1:3 with Matthew 16:26?
4. What is the problem with man looking for satisfaction in things of this world (Eccl 1:8; Prov 27:20)? Where can it be found (Phil 4:6-7, 11-13)?
5. What are some of your real-life experiences or examples from our society that show why the theme of this book is still needed today?