

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] Before Calvin and Grant were born Brianna and I miscarried. It was around Christmas time and to make matters worse it happened the day after we told all of our family to celebrate. One of the things I remember vividly from that time was the next Sunday. I wasn't a pastor and was just attending. But I remember it because I was so weary. I felt desperate riddled with grief, confused, and angry. I came just hoping God would show up. But the church we attended actually began the service with a bit of a comedy routine on how to read your Bible. I remember sitting there just stunned and unamused. I don't mean to disparage the church because they didn't mean anything cruel by it. But I was struck by the absurdity of it. I came grappling with death and suffering and instead I got jokes.

We are starting a new series today in the Book of Ecclesiastes. And the book of Ecclesiastes does not come at us with banality. It is a serious book. It doesn't have time for jokes or random doctrinal arguments. It wants to talk about the reality of life as it is. It starts off right away and tells us that everything is vanity and wants to talk about death.

2. [Need] The problem is that this book is difficult. Martin Luther called it the most difficult book in the Bible that no one had ever mastered. I think a lot of this has to do with the fact that it is uncomfortable. We do not want to think about our own deaths. Most of our world is set up to deny the reality of death and to keep it at bay. But the book is also difficult because we don't easily see how it relates to God and to Christ.

3. [Subject] This morning we are going to talk about death. I'm going to cover the first chapter, but I am also hoping to set us up so that we can study the rest of the book well. I am honestly a little nervous to get into this book more. Maybe it will be a disaster and I'll punt and we will study another book. But one thing I can promise is that we are going to wrestle with this book. And we are going to find the gospel in it. Each week we are going to see what this has to do with Jesus.

4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 1

5. [Preview] The main message, the problem, and the gospel.

Our first point and it is mainly the big idea of the book. **We will all die and be forgotten. We will all die and be forgotten.**

I do not say this to be glib.

I don't mean to be cruel or to treat this as a joke.

I am as serious as I can be.

This is the point of these first 11 verses and the whole book.

All of us are going to die one day.

Now as we unpack this let's look at verse 1 **"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem."**

The name of the author is not used here, but we get the title **"Preacher"**

Or your translation may say "teacher," or "collector"

The Hebrew word is Qoheleth.

So some refer to the author just by their title.

I don't want to spend a ton of time here, but there is some disagreement and debate over who the "preacher" is.

The main option is that this book was written by Solomon, King David's actual son

Or the more popular opinion, even among strong Christian scholars is that we don't know who wrote it, but they are emulating Solomon.

Not that they are ghostwriting, or trying to fool anyone.

But that they collected these wise sayings together and some of them are probably from Solomon.

Now we don't have any idea.

I'm content to just say it's Solomon.

I think it fits autobiographically,

Plus the early church fathers said it was Solomon and I don't like to disagree with them unless I have good biblical grounds.

Throughout the series I'll either refer to the author as Solomon, or just the preacher.

But the preacher starts off the sermon right away with a good hook in verse 2 **"vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities all is vanity."**

The word **"vanity"** is going to pop up a lot over the next several weeks as we study this book.

Your translation may say "meaningless," "smoke," "vapor," or my favorite in the NET "futile."

Verse 3 **"What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"**

What is the point and result of everything that we do in life?

What do we gain from it?

Someone who spends their entire life building their own business dies and it's sold then stripped for parts.

After years of effort spent writing a book, it never gets read

Generations of family land get turned into a mall.

We can be impressed by our toil.

But the reality is that all of our hard work doesn't result in much in the grand scheme of eternity.

And this phrase **"under the sun"**

I do not think that this just is looking at the secular life.

It is not simply saying everything non-Christians do is vanity.

Instead, I think it is looking at our broken world.

It examines how sin and death have totally transformed our experience.

We are no longer in the garden of Eden.

Verse 4 **"A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever."**

Whole generations die and fade away.

It is not just that all of us will die.

It is that our whole generation will pass away and be replaced.
Generations that don't know the sacrifices you made
Generations that don't really care what you did and will do their own thing.
This leads to a lot of frustration and conflict between generations.

Each generation dies and fades, **"but the earth remains forever"**

This is a poetic observation.

We will fade, but the world keeps on spinning.

Earth has been here since God made it.

It's seen thousands of generations and may see thousands more.

Almost all of those people have faded from all memory.

Verse 5 **"the sun rises, and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rises."**

Every morning the sun goes up.

Every night the sun goes down.

After it goes down it heads to go back up again.

There hasn't ever been a morning the sun didn't rise

There has never been an evening the sun didn't set.

Verse 6 describes the wind. **"The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits, the wind returns."**

The preacher describes the path that the wind seems to take.

The wind blows here and there.

It goes everywhere and then just keeps going on.

Sometimes there might be hurricane's or tornados,

Other times there's no wind.

But there is always wind somewhere.

Nothing you can do will stop the wind from blowing.

It's as ceaseless as the rising and setting sun.

Verse 7 **"All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again."**

He then talks about the water and the rushing waves.
It's another metaphor of unceasing activity, but nothing changes.
Massive rivers pour into the ocean all over the world,
But the oceans don't get too full.
And there are still rivers running.

Verse 8 **"All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."**

This seems strange on the surface.
But the preacher means that recognizing our deaths makes us weary.
We don't know how to talk about it.
And our eyes and ears are never satisfied on this side of eternity.
There is nothing you can see that will last.
Nothing you can hear that is so beautiful you don't need to hear anymore.

We always want more.
You read an amazing book or watch an incredible show, but after a while
you need to find another one.
And when you try and go back it doesn't quiet satisfy like the first time.

Verse 9 **"what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."**

Now the preacher is not saying that nothing new has ever been invented.
But he is saying that everything is basically the same.
New inventions promise to change everything and make our lives better,
But he is saying that none of them will satisfy our eyes, ears, or hearts.
They cannot stop the inevitability of death.

We have made tons of advances in medicine.
Like when they discovered you should wash your hands.

Life expectancy has gone way up compared to when this was written.
But it can't make us live forever.

Verse 10 **"Is there a thing of which is said "See, this is new?" It has been already in the ages before us."**

Again this doesn't mean we don't invent things.

It just means that our inventions do not change us as much as we hoped.
All of our modern inventions have made us more efficient than ever before
in human history.

Yet everyone always says that they are so busy.

We think we are busier than those who had to spend a week doing their
laundry.

Our inventions have not changed who we are as human beings.

We are still broken and sinful.

And we are all still going to die.

Verse 11 **"There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after."**

This tells us that we do not remember the past.

Worse it tells us that those who come after us excited about the future will
be forgotten as well.

Because all the past you wish people would remember used to be new
and exciting.

This tells us that we are all going to be forgotten one day.

Our name will be found in some dusty yearbook no one looks at.

Or on a stone long forgotten in an old cemetery.

The reality that we want to forget, but must remember is that all of us will
die and be forgotten one day.

I think that a core part of my job as a pastor is to help us prepare for death
and die well.

Those who do not know Jesus get distracted.

They believe that this life is all that matters.

They believe that money, or pleasure, or work, or fame, or even lots of wonderful family and friends will make them matter.

But it all fades.

[**transition**] So what can we do? Well, the preacher in Ecclesiastes wants us to know what he tried.

Point number 2 is that **Wisdom can't stop death. Wisdom can't stop death.**

This is the idea of the second part of the chapter, but it also summarizes the expectation for the rest of the book.

There is not going to be some secret he found in humanity that gives life meaning.

Over these twelve chapters in the book, he will describe what he has tried and all the wisdom that he has.

The problem is that human wisdom alone is insufficient.

Verse 12 **"I the preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind."**

He looked at all that we do and sees that it is nothing but dust in the wind. Everything that we do is futile.

It cannot hold back the inevitable.

Verse 15 **"What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted."**

This just acknowledges our inability to stop death.

It's unchanging and unfixable by human hands.

The amount that is lacking is our human knowledge.

Even with all the wisdom in the world.
Even with more books being written every day.

Verse 16 **"I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."**

He dedicates himself to figuring out this problem and human conundrum.
He applied all of his heart to this problem.
He read all the books he could find.
He sought out all the wise sages.
He had more wisdom than anyone else
And he came up blank with nothing.

Verse 17 **"and I applied my heart to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind."**

In this book, we will watch the preacher's journey to solve our problem.
He will try everything he can think of.
But none of it will work.
Not only will none of it stop death from coming.
None of his solutions will satisfy.
They are nothing more than chasing wind.

Verse 18 **"for in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."**

All of this chasing wisdom has not brought Solomon peace.
It actually seems to make things worse!

In part, this is a warning for the rest of the book.
Don't think that it will start badly and then get better.
He warns you ahead of time that this search only increased his sorrow.

We live in what is commonly called the information age.

Because we have more information than anytime in human history.
And we have access to that information at all times.
Grab a computer, or phone and you can learn almost anything you want.
The answer to your question can be found in a few seconds if you know
how to search correctly.

And all of that information has not made us complete.
It has not led to world peace.
Instead, it has increased our sorrow.

The internet gives us more information than is good for us.
Hearing everyone's opinion on every latest event increases our sorrow.
And we learn about everything everywhere all the time.
We have 24-7 news so that you can learn about the latest tragedy the
moment it happens.
Your knowledge of the suffering and sin in the world has never been
greater.

And it all still leaves us empty.

[Transition] That's all the bad news. We are all going to die and there is
nothing we can do to stop it. The question is who can? And the answer is
Jesus.

Point number 3 is that **Jesus defeated death and remembers us. Jesus
defeated death and remembers us.**

I don't know about you, but reading this book makes me long for Jesus
and the gospel.
You cannot understand Ecclesiastes without understanding Jesus.
You can't understand any book or part of the Bible until you figure out how
it points to Jesus.

And I hope throughout our study of this book it will make you cry out for Jesus along with me.

We will study this book all the way till Advent, or Christmas.

And by then I think we will all be ready for the coming of Jesus.

So how does Jesus help us?

Or how does the coming of Jesus help us understand this chapter and this book?

One way many approach this book is to say that it only is looking at things **"under the sun."**

That under the sun is just viewing life without Jesus.

So all of this depressing stuff is only true for non-Christians.

That's partially true, but I think it's incomplete.

Because all of us Christian or not live under the sun right now.

And we will still have to toil and work.

And our lives will still end and we will be forgotten by most people.

Again I think Ecclesiastes is examining how life has been shattered by sin.

Our hope is not then that this life will be different for us.

No, our hope instead is that Jesus has defeated death.

Death hangs over the book of Ecclesiastes.

Its reality is what we have been grappling with and what bothers the Preacher.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul calls death our last enemy.

It is the foe that haunts our dreams.

It has ruined the world.

But we worship a God who conquered death.

The gospel is not just that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

The gospel is not just that Jesus offers all eternal life and hope after the death.

The gospel is also that Jesus defeated death on the cross and the empty tomb.

Jesus took death's best punch and walked right out of that tomb in victory.
And through the death and life of Jesus

Christian, you will die, but you will live again.
Death is your enemy, but it will not win.
It cannot hold you in its grasp.
Jesus will come again and bring resurrection.

At the cross, Jesus defeated the power of death.
But death still reigns in our world.
But death is a lame-duck ruler.

It is like presidents who are voted out of the office and we are just counting down until the next one comes in.
Jesus has voted death out.
And Jesus' eternal reign is coming to come.
And when Jesus comes again death will be gone forever.

Our hope is in the God of resurrection.
And when Jesus died the whole earth itself recognized Jesus' victory.
In one of the strangest passages of the Bible in Matthew 28 describes the victory of Jesus.
On the moment that Jesus dies, the curtain of the temple is torn in two.
But the earth itself shakes and rocks break open.
And then tombs are opened and the bodies of saints come out of their graves and are resurrected.

It's so bizarre and strange.
I've heard plenty of sermons on the curtains,
But less on the resurrections.

What I think happened at that moment is that death's grip on the world was loosened.

And the power of Christ's resurrection burst forth.

It is like the world itself got so excited that it had to let it out.

This is our hope.

Our God has defeated death.

And one day He will bring resurrection.

There are things about life that are futile and vanity.

But there is a life to come.

There is a better life awaiting those who put their faith in Christ.

We can get a taste of it now,

But experiencing it will be better than we can imagine.

There is a worship song by Cory Asbury named "*Christ be Magnified*" that I love. It goes

**If the cross brings transformation then I'll be crucified with You
'Cause death is just the doorway into resurrection life
And if I join You in Your suffering, then I'll join You when You rise
And when You return in glory with all the angels and the saints
My heart will still be singing, my song will be the same
Oh! Christ be magnified**

So part of our gospel hope is that Jesus defeated death.

The other portion is that Jesus remembers us.

What do I mean by this?

Well, part of the frustration of life the preacher in Ecclesiastes says is that we die and are forgotten.

But Jesus promises to remember us.

Part of the truth of the gospel is that you have been adopted into God's family and He knows your name.

The thief on the cross cried out to Jesus
"Remember me when you come into your kingdom."
And Jesus said, "Today I will be with you in paradise."

Jesus will remember you Christian.
You are not one of the nameless billions who has walked the globe.
You are not simply a face in the crowd.
You are not someone that Jesus struggles to remember their name.

Jesus loves you.
The Scriptures tells us in Luke 12 That not a single sparrow that has ever
lived is forgotten by God.
He remembers every single one.
They all look the same to me, but not to God.
That same passage reminds us that **"even the hairs of your head are all
numbered. Fear not you are of more value than many sparrows."**

God knows your name.
He knows every hair on your head.
He knows all the hairs on everyone's head who has ever lived.
The world may forget you, but Jesus will not.
Even if you forget yourself, Jesus will not forget you.

Your life has meaning and significance because Jesus knows and loves
you.

What a wonderful savior we serve!

So what should we do?
What is our response, or application?
Who cares about life and what we do since Jesus will bring us back?
No.

I'm actually going to skip ahead to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes.

I'm spoiling the end for you because the last two verses help us make sense of the rest of the book.

12:13-14 **"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."**

What will last?

What is worth doing in life?

Living as if one day you will stand before Jesus.

You see the reality of the resurrection changes our present reality.

Because we will live again this life matters.

Every single thing we do matters.

Not because anyone will remember it, but because one day we will stand before God for judgment.

So how should we live?

We should live obedient lives.

We should live as if God sees everything we do.

Everything that we do in secret when no one is watching.

This is bad news for those who want to earn their salvation, or who do not know Jesus.

Because without grace you are going to be judged harshly.

But if you have put your faith in Jesus, then He already took your punishment and paid your fine.

And the good news is that everything we do obediently for God is seen.

Jesus will remember not just your name but everything you did for Him.

He will remember every time you gave to the poor.

He will remember every time you held your tongue.

He will remember every time you shared the love of Jesus.

And when the God who defeated death returns you will be rewarded.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] We will all die and be forgotten and nothing in this world can stop that from happening except for Jesus.
2. [Challenge] With Jesus we will live again. Put your faith in Christ and live with hope.