

“The Good Life”

Sermon Notes

➤ **Life under the sun is entirely upside down – life under the Son is right side up but it sure looks upside down**

**Only in Christ can we get right side up on...*

1. ...death (vv.1-4; John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 2:14-15)

2. ...truth (vv.5-7; John 14:6; 18:37; 2 John 1-4; 3 John 3-4)

3. ...wrath (vv.8-9; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; Colossians 3:1-11)

4. ...youth (v.10; Hebrews 9:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 4:13-18)

5. ...wealth (vv.11-12; Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10)

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of January 24th-30th

As it's been over a month since we last found ourselves studying Ecclesiastes, perhaps a bit of a refresher course is in order. This week, along with your family or your community group, enjoy reading, reflecting on, and discussing this article written a handful of years ago by David Prince, Pastor of Preaching and Vision at Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, KY. What do you find helpful about it? Which parts challenge or confirm your thinking on this book? Is there anything with which you disagree? As the piece is titled "The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes", how does the author seek to stir up our affections for Christ? What's one practical truth or take away that you believe will bear fruit in your life in the coming days?

"The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes"

By David Prince¹

The book of Ecclesiastes is about living with joy because of the grace of God. Many miss that fact because of how sober-minded and honest "the Preacher" (Ecc 1:1, Heb., *qohelet*) of Ecclesiastes is about genuine pain, heartache, and suffering in this fallen and fleeting world. Martin Luther explained the positive nature of the book in his outstanding introduction, "The summary and aim of this book, then, is as follows: Solomon wants to put us at peace and to give us a quiet mind in the everyday affairs and business of this life, so that we live contentedly in the present without care and yearning about the future and are, as Paul says, without care and anxiety (Phil. 4:6)."

Too often, our superficial, triumphalistic approach to Christianity in America doesn't face the real problems of living in a sinful world. In Ecclesiastes 8:14, the Preacher, provides this depressing assessment, "There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity." Not exactly the kind of descriptions that would make a tourism brochure for the global chamber of commerce. But the preacher in Ecclesiastes follows that statement up with "I commend joy" and "to eat and drink and be joyful" (Ecc 8:15). What is the connection between gut-wrenching, painful injustice and being joyful?

Answering that question unlocks the message of Ecclesiastes for us. The entire book confronts the tendency God's image bearers have to want to be God rather than trust God. Ecclesiastes teaches us that we can only come to God on the basis of who He is and not on the basis of who we are. Often, we think we can have it all, know it all, experience it all, achieve it all, be happy in it all, have all of the answers for all, never wonder why things happen, and make a name for ourselves that will be remembered forever. Only God can be and do all of that, we are not Him, and that fact is a glorious reality.

God doesn't give us details about everything that will happen in our lives and why it all happens. It is far better than that. He gives us Himself. Thus, Solomon explains in Proverbs, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10). True wisdom is knowing what you don't know but trusting in

¹ <https://www.davidprince.com/2018/08/07/the-gospel-according-to-ecclesiastes/> . Accessed 1/23/21 @ 10:45am.

the sovereign God you do know and believing that life is “all the work of God” (Ecc 8:17). Jesus told the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, die, and be raised. Peter responded like we would have, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt 16:22). None of us would have planned the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of God the Son. Jesus responded, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me” (Matt 16:23). The desire to be God rather than trust God can be traced all the way back to a snake in the garden.

The fact there is a God who has made glorious promises to us, and we are not Him, rescues us from cynicism and despair as we live our fleeting lives in a fallen world. The preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us that the difficulties of this life are the same for the righteous and wicked, clean and unclean, those who sacrifice and those who do not, the good and the sinner, and the one who swears and the one who does not swear (Ecc 9:2). Most importantly, one thing he says is certain in life for all—death (Ecc 9:3). These are not the type of verses you will find on Hallmark Cards. The dividing line between believer and unbeliever is not that believers are spared pain, heartache, and injustice, and unbelievers are not. The dividing line is that believers know that they live this life “under the hand of God” (Ecc 9:1) and there is more going on than what we see with our eyes or feel in the moment.

The believer who trusts God does not ask this life to give what only God can give, joy and contentment. The inevitability of death causes the one who by faith fears the Lord to enjoy life to the full, knowing it is fleeting. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes follows his reminder of the inevitability of death with a series of commands that only make sense in light of a sovereign and holy God:

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going. (Ecc 9:7-10)

Life is to be lived practically, passionately, and energetically as a gift from God. The wise person knows the simple things of life matter, not just what we deem are the big moments. We must not ignore the glimpses of glory that invade our daily lives. The one who fears the Lord is liberated from trying to make a name for themselves and craving the momentary applause of men. The Preacher tells us what really matters for all people in all places, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc 12:13).

Thus, daily life is to be a sober-minded but wide-eyed attempt to trust, glorify, and enjoy God, embracing the lot He has given us in this fleeting life. We must abide in Christ, the “one Shepherd” to whom the Preacher points (Ecc 12:10), because apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). If we do abide in Christ, His joy is in us, and our joy can be made full (John 15:11).

In Him, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecc 1:2) is transformed into “Eternity of eternities!
All is eternity.”²