



Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

“Limited Efforts”

6/5/2022

Speaker: Pastor Drew Hunsley

Anaheim Hills, CA | RockCC.com

Transcript

24:49

So I'm gonna invite you guys to make your way to Ecclesiastes chapter one. If you've got your scripture journal, if you've got your copy of God's word, if you wanna grab one, there should be one underneath of you in your chair or in the chair in front of you.

25:01

So as you guys make your way there to Ecclesiastes chapter one, we'll all turn together. But while we're turning, I want you guys to think about some of your favorite activities that you would do when you were a kid during the summer.

25:16

Summer is kind of upon us. We're a couple of weeks away from the official start of summer on June 21st. But as we think about, you know, kids are getting out of school. Everybody's kind of looking for their opportunities to go out and do stuff.

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The summer plans are in full swing right now, right? So as you think about your childhood, what were some of the things that you enjoyed doing as a kid on summer break? Maybe you wanted to go outside and play ball.

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Maybe you wanted to go and ride your bike. Or if you were like me, we had a little biker gang with all of the kids. We'd go out, ride our bikes together around the neighborhood and get into all kinds of trouble and stuff.

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I guess in Southern California, maybe some of you like to go surfing. I didn't grow up here, so I'm not a surfer. But the Beach Boys told me that that's what everybody in Southern California was doing.

26:04

So as I think about these different things, one of my kids' favorites that they always enjoy doing is playing with bubbles, right? We'll get the little bubble machine going or they'll get the little tiny containers of bubbles and we blow bubbles out in the front yard.

26:18

But as you're blowing bubbles, every kid, and my kids are no exception, every kid wants to go and catch the bubbles, right? You wanna chase after the bubbles and you try to catch them on the little thing or they go after them and try to pop them with their fingers, right?

26:31

They chase after this idea of they wanna go get the bubbles. This week's passage, as we look at Ecclesiastes chapter one, we're gonna see the fact that there's things in life that are kinda like that experience that my kids go chasing after the bubbles and as they chase after them and chase after them and they go to catch them and they don't ever actually catch a bubble, right?

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You don't catch the bubble, you pop the bubble as soon as you put your hands on it. So this idea of chasing after something that's unattainable for us, our efforts in this fallen world, this world that's under the sun as Ecclesiastes describes it, we're gonna see that it's like trying to chase after or try, excuse me, trying to catch the wind.

27:13

So we're gonna see that in our passage. I'm gonna invite you to read, we're gonna read our passage. We're gonna read Ecclesiastes chapter one verses 12 through 18. So I'd invite you to follow along in your copy of God's words or on the screens as we read.

27:27

It says starting in 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.

27:43

I have seen everything that is done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be counted. So 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 and I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.

28:08

I perceive that this also is but a striving after wind for in much wisdom, there is much vexation and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. These are the words of our Lord. Would you guys pray with me?

28:22

God, we thank you for your word. God, for your promised perfect word that you give to us and God, as we have the opportunity to study these few verses, these few thoughts from Ecclesiastes this morning.

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God, we pray that you would help us to grasp what it is that you want to communicate to us today. God, we look around in this world and there's so many things that we chase after and we think they're going to make us happy and we think they're going to fulfill us and we think that they're gonna do something for us but ultimately they're like chasing after wind.

28:50

They're like chasing after those bubbles that you never quite catch what you think you're going to catch. So God, as we talk about these different things, God, we pray that you would speak to us this morning.

29:00

God, that you would give us ears to hear what you have to say to your church this morning. So God, we give this time to you and we pray that you would be lifted up and that you would be glorified during our time together this morning.

29:09

So we love you and we praise you. It's in your son's name we pray, amen. All right, so as we jump in, the first thing that we're going to see in verse 12 is the preacher, Qoheleth, he's talking about his reach, he's talking about his credentials.

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So in verse 12 he says, I, the preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. So we talked a little bit about it in the past couple of weeks, but there's a little bit of disagreement about who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

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Was it Solomon? Was it some other writer that was kind of taking on this Solomon -like character? But regardless of who it was that was writing, we don't really know, but either way, this famous king's life kind of provides a little context for us as we look at the book of Ecclesiastes.

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We want to kind of keep his story in mind. So the fact that the king, the preacher here, speaks in this perfect tense. He says, I have been king. It kind of communicates to us that he's writing with some experience.

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He's got a little bit of tread on the tires at this point. He's been the king for some time. He says, I have been the king. So he's writing from this vantage point of age. He's writing from this vantage point of experience.

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He's able to say, you know, I've been there, I've tried this, I've done all of these things. And so as he's preparing to kind of report his findings about all of the searching that he's done in life, about all the things that he's gone and chased after, he's telling us his credentials, right?

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He tells us that I have been the king over Israel, over Jerusalem. And so, you know, as we look at goals, as we look at projects that people will take on at times, I think there's kind of an understanding among all of us that there's times where we look at a project and we realize, you know, I can't do that right now.

30:56

I don't have the ability to do that. Many of us, you know, if you own a home, you may look at something and go, man, I really wish we could remodel this area, but we can't afford it. Well, the king didn't have any of those limitations.

31:08

If money was a problem for somebody else, money was not a problem for him. He had unlimited resources. He had unlimited power. If somebody else is going to come in and the, you know, Pastor Ron's dealing with all kinds of stuff with the zoning people and the inspection people with his house, we're continuing to pray for that.

31:24

But, you know, if you have something that you want to come in and do in your home, maybe you've got money, but maybe the city says, no, you can't do that. There's a limitation on where you can build or what you can do or, you know, well, the king didn't have that problem, did he?

31:38

He had unlimited resources. He had unlimited power. So as he's talking about this quest that he's going out on to seek wisdom, to try his hardest, to go and to find the answers that he's looking for, while others may have been forced to stop at some point for whatever reason, that wasn't the case for him.

31:56

He was the king. He was the one that had the power. He was the one that had the resources. So he had no limits and he's telling us that the scope of his search was broad. He's telling us that he didn't come up short because of some lack of resources or lack of power.

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He's telling us, I had the opportunity and I chased after these things. So let's see now, was there any findings? What was the things that got in the way? So if we look at verses 13 through 15, he's talking about his work.

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He's talking about his own effort in this quest and realizes and kind of acknowledges to us that his work was limited, right? In verse 13, he says, I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

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He said it is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. So the preacher that's speaking here, Qoheleth's quest, it was a good quest. It was a sincere quest. He said, I applied my heart, which means that his pursuit, he wanted to chase after these things.

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His pursuit of knowledge came from the very core of who he was. He said, I wanted deeply to go and to find these things. I was searching for the answers of life and as I searched, I did it with all my heart.

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I did it as hard as I possibly could. We see that his quest was comprehensive as well, right? The words that are mentioned here, to seek and to search, they indicate the seriousness of his efforts. It wasn't just something that he kind of glanced over there and went, well, I guess I don't see it.

33:31

Oh, well, moving on. No, he searched as hard as he possibly could. He was focused and disciplined in his search. He wanted to know the truth. This was the drive of his existence. He wanted to find the answers.

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He applied himself. He was searching. He was seeking. And we continue on now in verse 14. He says, I have seen everything. I've been everywhere. I've seen it all. I've done it all. I've seen everything that is done under the sun.

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And behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What we see here is some of these phrases that were only like two or three weeks into this, depending on if you count the round table. But we've already started to see these phrases start to pop up time and time again, right?

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We see the preacher is using some of his favorite phrases that we're going to see throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. First he says that he's looking under the sun, right? That idea of under the sun comes up so many different times.

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What he's describing to us is he's looking at things from an earthly perspective. And as he talks about things under the sun, he describes all these things that he finds under the sun as vanity, which literally is translated as smoke or vapor.

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It's this thing that we look at and we think it's going to be solid. We think it's going to come through for us. But as we go to grab it, you can't grab smoke. You can look at smoke. You can see smoke and you can acknowledge that smoke is there.

34:56

But when you go and try to grab it, you can't get your hands around it. It's kind of similar to the kids that are out in the front yard chasing bubbles. They pop them as soon as they touch them. We also see here in this week's passage that he introduces a new phrase, this metaphor that we're gonna see time and time again throughout Ecclesiastes that kind of encapsulates his philosophy, his outlook on life, right?

35:18

He describes that life under the sun is like striving after wind. Striving after the wind. So there's some uncertainty around this word "striving" so the smart people that do all the

translation work, they kind of argue over which word would be the best word for us to use to translate this word striving.

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It can mean chasing and so some translations say chasing. It can also mean things like feeding or it can mean things like shepherding but regardless of whatever translation, whatever word we choose, none of these activities has any hope of mastering the wind.

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If you feed the wind, when is the wind ever going to be satisfied, ever going to be full? What about if you tried to shepherd the wind and tried to corral it into a certain area, well, we're limited in that too, right?

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People talk about something being difficult. They'll talk about how it's like trying to herd cats. Well, have you ever tried to shepherd wind before? Say, no, no, no, go over here and stay in this little area.

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All right, we're gonna come up short. There's many good minds that have reached the conclusion that this meaning of life, this chasing after something like the wind, it's simply unattainable. We think we wanna go and chase after this thing.

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We wanna go, oh, well, if I just can get that raise, then I'll be happy. If I can just get that promotion, then I'll be happy. If I can just finish this education goal that I'm working on, I can just get that house.

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I can just find a spouse. I can just get whatever it is. We build all these things up and ultimately, the writer of Ecclesiastes describes them as simply chasing after wind or

striving after wind. There's many good minds that have reached the conclusion that the meaning of life is, it's simply unattainable.

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We can't understand what the meaning of life is. We look at life and we try to figure it out and philosophers for generations have been frustrated by this question of "what is the meaning of life? What is it that we're here for?"

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Why do we exist?" And so talking about this topic, the poet Ezra Pound once said, he said, all my life, I believed that I knew something. But then one day, one strange day came when I realized that I knew nothing.

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Yes, I knew nothing. And so words became void of meaning. It's the reason why if you ever bump into an old philosopher, they kind of have the same disposition about them, don't they? That there comes a point that as we ask this question time and time again from an earthly perspective, what is the meaning of life?

37:49

Why are we here? Why does humanity exist? We'll hear people that just sound grumpy about it, right? There is no meaning. We live and we die and we're gone and that's okay. If we look at things from a human perspective, they're kind of not wrong, right?

38:07

They're kind of not wrong. So as Ezra Pound, excuse me, threw his hands up and said all words, all knowledge, all the things that I've been chasing after all my life, they just left me empty. They left me with nothing.

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Well, that kind of matches up with what we're seeing here from the preacher in Ecclesiastes, right? Verse 15, he kind of illustrates this whole idea with a proverb. He says, what is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be counted.

38:36

This proverb, this little statement is, it kind of illustrates one of the keys to the book of Ecclesiastes. No matter how much we try, we're limited in certain areas of life, right? No matter how hard we work, no matter how much we think we can do something, there's times where life just fails to add up.

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We look at things and we go, no, no, no, it's supposed to work this way and then that's not the way it works. You work hard and work hard and work hard and think that the boss is acknowledging all the things that you're doing and then ultimately somebody else gets the raise or they hire somebody in from the outside for that promotion that you thought you deserve, that you've worked so hard.

39:13

We look at things in life and we just go, that doesn't add up. Life doesn't make sense sometimes, right? We realize that sometimes there's moments where we just kind of have to throw our hands up and say, well, you know, life is what it is.

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There's nothing that we can do to fix it. There's so many things that were powerless to change. It's the reason why he describes here what is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be counted.

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Have you ever tried to count something that you didn't have? You're probably gonna come up short, right? It's kind of a humorous picture. All right, let me count my, oh, I don't have any. Nevermind. If anybody's ever been in an accident before, you realize that when a car gets twisted, you're in big trouble.

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That's not something that you're gonna fix. If the bumper gets crushed and twisted, you don't try to fix the bumper, you just have to replace the bumper because it's things that are twisted don't get untwisted correctly a lot of the time.

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That which is twisted, which is crooked, cannot be made straight, and that which is lacking cannot be counted. If we could understand these few verses in kind of a simple way, verses 13 and 14, what the writer is trying to tell us, he's telling us that God has ordained that this way of life, that if God is in control, right, we believe that God is ultimately in control, that he ultimately has power over everything.

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So if God created us, God created the world, God has the power to change anything that he wants to change. He's sovereign, he's in control. And so as long as we're living here in this world, it means that God has put this heavy burden as it's described in verse 13.

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This heavy burden on us, because we live in this world that it can't hold up to all of the things that we kind of want to put on it, right? We think life is gonna give me all the things that I deserve, it's gonna make me happy, it's gonna give me all the things that I want, but living in this world that we live in, it's kind of an existence that leaves us frustrated at times, right?

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It leaves us stressed out, it leaves us working and struggling and trying to find the answers, but it's like chasing after wind. And then if we were to restate this proverb from verse 15, I think that we could understand it as talking about the futility of life, the futility of life that's lived out here, the human existence under heaven, under the sun.

41:31

It's like people that are trying to straighten out what's twisted or count something that isn't there. We simply can't do it. If we look at life, if we look at things on this world, and there's lots of good things, and we're gonna get to that as we continue through the book of Ecclesiastes, there's things that we can enjoy.

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There's things like time with family. Well, that's an enjoyable thing. We can sit down at a good meal. That's a good thing. We go to work and we do something that's meaningful that we enjoy doing. Well, that's something that gives us meaning and purpose.

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That can be a good thing, but when we take those things and we elevate them to the priority of most important in our lives, whatever those other things are, they ultimately leave us lacking. They ultimately leave us wanting more.

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We can't find the thing that's ultimately going to fulfill us under the sun. If we're trying to find those things, it's like we're trying to go out and take a bucket and a lid and go capture the wind.

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Good luck, right? You can't catch the wind. It simply doesn't work that way. So if you were to go out and try to take a net, try to take a bucket and go catch the wind, you can't catch the wind. So we're left with this futility as we simply can't do what we're trying to set ourselves out to do.

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Let's continue on, verses 16 through 18. He's talking about first, his effort, his work was limited, but now he sees in 16 through 18, he admits that his wisdom was limited as well. In the same way as the preacher was talking about how all of his work, how all of his effort was unsuccessful at helping him find the meaning of life, he says that this under the sun wisdom, that this wisdom that we can go and gather for ourselves from all these different places in life, it also leaves us empty.

43:14

Let's read these verses 16 through 18 again. The preacher says, 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, and I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly, and I perceive that this also is but a striving after wind, for in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

43:46

Earthly wisdom can be a powerful tool that we can put to use in the world, right? We can look at things, we can learn things, we can even sometimes use wisdom to make good decisions. There is wisdom out there that can be useful, but anyone who has ever tried to use wisdom before to predict what's gonna happen in the future realizes just how empty this wisdom, this under the sun wisdom actually can be.

44:12

So we're talking about this inability of this under the sun wisdom, this human wisdom that people can gather and learn things. David Allen Hubbard wrote a commentary on Ecclesiastes. He said, talking about this topic, he said, think of the massive problems that confront our huge cities, treasuries that are on the edge of bankruptcy, unemployment at alarming levels, education perplexed about its directions,

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crime rates soaring to eagle heights. Wisdom is much better able to analyze the trends than it is to prescribe the solutions. If we thought wisdom was going to have the answers, if we thought that we could just go out there and learn enough and it would tell us how we need to handle our situation, eventually we realized that those things come up empty.

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Even the good things, even if we wanna go learn about something that someone else has some good things to say about the topic, it's ultimately not going to tell us everything that we need to know to guarantee future success, right?

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Investments, anybody that's ever made an investment, there's always that waiver at the bottom, right? Past performance is not indicative of what's gonna happen in the future. Just because this stock has performed well in the past doesn't mean that we're gonna guarantee that you are going to perform well in the future.

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Anybody that's ever gone out and tried to learn something and predict how the outcome is gonna go, you realize really quickly that you can't actually guarantee what you want to guarantee. Parents often will bemoan the fact that kids don't come with an instruction manual, right?

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I wish there were instructions on how to deal with this and how to deal with that, we can go out, you know there's like thousands and thousands and thousands of books that were written on parenting that you can go out there on the internet and find and read.

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There's a lot of good things that are out there. People that have raised good, respectable children, successful children, people that have gone through all of the wringer of how parenting can stretch us and challenge us at times, right?

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But anybody that's ever gone and picked up a parenting book realizes really quickly that just because the book said so doesn't always mean that that's the way it works in real life, right? Just because we think we've got some answers, there's good things that are in there.

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We can learn some things that are in there but that doesn't guarantee that it has all the answers for us as we look at all these things, this kind of wisdom that the preacher had in mind, this under the sun wisdom, it wasn't divine, it was simply human wisdom, human truth that we could go and gather for ourselves, things that we can perceive in the world.

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And those are, at times, can be good things but wisdom as we talk about it in scripture, we know that that word wisdom often has these positive connotations that are kind of associated with it in the Bible.

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But we know that the word wisdom that shows up in scripture doesn't always mean that it's wisdom from God. There's these times where we talk about human wisdom in the scripture and we talk about God's wisdom in the scripture.

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This Hebrew word that's translated as wisdom is kind of a broad term. It simply refers to what human beings can learn and so we sometimes learn things from God and we know that that wisdom is perfect but we also learn that these other things that we can grasp and hold on to in life, this human wisdom, we can learn things and sometimes they're true but that doesn't always guarantee that wisdom has all the answers to all the problems that we think that it should.

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Seeking after wisdom is a worldly pursuit, is a good pursuit at times but ultimately it's limited in how far it can go. preacher decided as he was talking throughout this passage. He decided that he would take a comparative approach.

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He was going to compare and contrast wisdom with what he describes as madness and folly. And when he uses the term madness and folly, he's not talking about going crazy. He's not talking about insanity.

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This term madness and folly, when it shows up in biblical wisdom literature, it simply kind of stands for sin. It talks about the wrong way of doing things, that the madness of going and chasing after what we think is best instead of what God says is best.

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It's doing the wrong thing. It's the wrong way of life. So as Qoheleth was trying to understand, trying to find this search for meaning and trying to find these things that would ultimately fulfill him in life as he was searching around in different places.

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And we're going to see him continue to search throughout Ecclesiastes. It says here that he tried, all right, I'm going to compare and contrast doing things the right way and maybe doing things the wrong way.

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He was looking for the difference between right and wrong. I think there's many people today who kind of have that same question, that same approach to life. Even if they don't believe that there's a God, there's many people who still believe that there's this objective truth, this right and wrong, that there's a right way of doing things and a wrong way of doing things, that there's good things that we can do and there's evil things that people do.

49:09

There's many people out there in the world. Most people I dare say out there in the world want to live good moral lives, right? Anytime that I've ever walked up to someone and had a conversation with them and asked them, well, what do you believe about the afterlife?

49:22

Oh, I believe there's a good place and a bad place or heaven and hell or whatever, however they describe it. And then you ask them the question, well, which one do you think that you're going to go to?

49:31

Oh, I'm going to go to the good place. I'm going to go to heaven. I'm definitely going to heaven, right? And then the next question that I'll always ask is, well, why? Why do you think that that's ultimately your destiny?

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And you know what people say, like 98% of the time that I asked that question, why do you think that you deserve to go to heaven? Oh, well, it's because I'm a good person. Everybody likes to consider themselves to be a good person, right?

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Even if we don't necessarily believe in the existence of God, maybe even if somebody disagrees on a lot of the things that we would say from the Bible, there's still people out there that most people want to say, oh yeah, there's good and bad, there's right and wrong.

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And no, no, I always do the right thing. I'm a good person. The preacher is talking throughout Ecclesiastes. He's talking here in these verses, and it tells us that he sought to understand both wisdom and folly.

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He sought to understand right and wrong. So what was the result of this quest? The claims of conventional morality that I'm going to go out, I'm going to figure out right and wrong, and I'll just live the way that I'm supposed to live.

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Well, ultimately, those claims of morality, they failed to satisfy his soul in the same way that many other things are going to fail to satisfy his soul. Verse 17, he says, I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly, but I perceive that this also is but a striving after wind.

50:56

Then he continues on, and he illustrates this with another proverb that we see in verse 18. He says in verse 18, for in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. like many Proverbs that are written.

51:09

This one is kind of open -ended. It kind of leaves us without any clear, pointed application of what we're gonna see here. But the preacher talks about vexation, which is kind of an irritation if it's stated lightly or is kind of outright anger if we state it strongly.

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The preacher says that wisdom, that seeking after wisdom has left him with much vexation. He's saying that rather than helping us understand life, rather than helping me find the answers that I'm looking for, even wisdom, even knowledge, even reading all the books.

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If I went out there and read all the books, all they're gonna do is leave me more frustrated. It actually increases his frustration as he has continued on this search, as he's chased after these things.

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Maybe it's because he realized that as we go and as we learn more things, we learn many things that we wish we didn't know, right? As we continue to learn things, we learn about the fact that there's problems in this world.

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We learn about the fact that evil exists. We learn about the fact that there's things out there that there's not really a solution for that we can make any difference in. When I was a child, I remember vividly wanting so badly to be grown up.

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I think most kids, we have this outlook: I wish I wasn't a kid. I wish I was a grown up. I can't wait until I start driving because then I'll have the freedom to go and to do the stuff that I wanna do instead of where mom and dad take me and say I have to go. I wish that I was in college, that I was out and independent and on my own because then I could make my own decisions. I could learn all the things for myself.

52:49

We look at these things and as a child, we just go, man, I wanna grow up. I wanna grow up so bad. I wanted to be able to go and do the things that I wasn't able to do as a child. I wanted to be able to understand, to have all the answers to all the questions that I had when I was a child.

53:05

When I grow up, I'll be able to... fill in the blank, right? Whatever it is, kids look at their childhood and go, man, I wish I could be a grown up because. There's even a Disney song about this, right?

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Anybody that's ever watched Frozen 2, Olaf sings this song that talks about how, I'll have all the answers when I'm older. Things will all make sense when I'm older. When you're older, absolutely everything makes sense and it's funny for all the parents that are sitting there in the movie theater watching this movie because a little adolescent Olaf

thinks that when he gets bigger, he'll have all the answers that he's looking for but the grownups that are sitting in the room go,

53:42

oh, you think that you're gonna know it all but as you get older, we realize that we don't ever have all the answers, right? It's funny because parents realize that all the things that we thought that we were going to know and understand when we were older, we still don't have the answers.

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We just have to pretend like it sometimes. No, no, no, no, no, kids, I know what I'm talking about. Just follow me. I have no idea what I'm doing. Eventually, we get older. We supposedly get wiser but as we get older and wiser, I think many of us in this room, if we had the option, what would we do?

54:16

Do we wanna stay a child or do we wanna get older? I wanna go back to being a kid. I wanna go back to the days that life was simpler, right? That the worries that you had were whether or not you got a second cookie, not all of the issues that you have now of bills and responsibilities and the evil stuff, the bad stuff, all the things that we've learned about, we go, ugh, I don't like all of this.

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You know, we make the statement ignorance is bliss. I think this is kinda what we're talking about and I think that's what the preacher, what the writer in Ecclesiastes is kinda talking about. We realize this.

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The more that we know about things, the more trouble it brings a lot of the time. The preacher had all the wisdom in the world and he says in verse 18 that it only brought him grief. He learned that through wisdom that there was nothing under the sun that ultimately fulfilled this goal that he was chasing after.

55:09

Yeah, I'm gonna go find it. I'm gonna go find the answer. And he realized after he searched and after he found all the things that there wasn't an answer out there that was ultimately going to fill him and give him what he was looking for.

55:22

His ignorance from before had been bliss. At first, I think as we are just starting, we're just a couple of weeks into our study of Ecclesiastes, we see this kind of Monday morning writing. It's like, here we go again, this attitude from the preacher in Ecclesiastes.

55:40

And we see it, and I think at first we go, well, that's refreshing, right? He's talking with some honesty about the things that we all see in life that we all grown and get frustrated by and stressed out by. But I think the more that we study this book, the more depressing it becomes, really. He's going to continue to chase after these things. I got this, and it left me empty. And I got this, and it left me empty.

56:04

And we're going to see time and time again, I think we may find ourselves, by some point in the middle of this book, find ourselves saying maybe everything in life really is worthless. Maybe it really is meaningless, like we see stated a few different times throughout Ecclesiastes.

56:19

But if all sounds hopeless as we study this book, I've got good news for you, that means that the writer is accomplishing what he's trying to accomplish here. Because we remember that this book is written, and we see this term under the sun, under the sun, under the sun show up so many different times.

56:35

He's telling us that from a simply human existence, things leave us empty, right? Whatever it is that we chase after, there's no amount of money, there's no amount of success, there's no amount of anything that we think we're going to chase after and get that's going to leave us satisfied, that's going to give us meaning and purpose in life.

56:55

So if it all sounds hopeless, that's a good thing, because that means that you're starting to pick up on what the book is actually trying to communicate to us. From an earthly perspective, nothing is going to fulfill this emptiness that we have inside of us.

57:10

See, the preacher throughout the book a few different places acknowledges the existence of God, but even as he acknowledges that God's there, he doesn't ever look to God throughout the book. There's no moments throughout the book of Ecclesiastes where he prays and seeks for God to intervene in his situation.

57:26

God, show me what it is that is the meaning of life. He never does that. We don't see him pray, we don't see him consult scripture. Instead, he's kind of going out there and doing his thing, right? I'll go find the answers, I'll figure it out for myself.

57:42

I'm sure there's a book out there somewhere that I can go and read, and this parenting book or this financial book or this, you know, how to influence people, and... those things will give me the answers that I'm looking for.

57:57

But as he continues to search and search and search, the emptiness of this search for meaning on his own is the reason why God says in Jeremiah 9 that we should never boast in our own wisdom or in our own power.

58:09

Jeremiah 9 verses 23 and 24, just follow along on the screens. It says in verse 23, thus says the Lord, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

58:35

For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. We think that wisdom, we think that power, we think that money is going to fulfill us, but they don't, Jeremiah 9 tells us. God goes even further in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 talking about this idea of wise people bragging about their wisdom.

58:53

First Corinthians 1 verse 19, it says, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Uh oh, if we think that we're going to find the answers with wisdom, even if you somehow get close, it seems to me that 1 Corinthians 1 is telling us even if we get close to finding the answers somehow, God's going to turn us aside, is going to thwart our efforts.

59:20

Ecclesiastes gives this bleak outlook on life, but the Spirit had a purpose in inspiring this book. We talked about it a few weeks ago, we believe wholeheartedly at this church that every single word in this book is given to us is breathed out directly from God.

59:35

There's no accidents in here, there's no mistakes in here, there's nowhere where God inspired the writer to turn right and he accidentally turned left and got confused. Every single word of it in here is exactly what God has for us.

59:50

So there was a reason that the Spirit inspired this book to be in here. God's not sitting here going, oh man, what are they doing with Ecclesiastes? That's like the weird stepchild of the family that we hope they don't find in the middle.

01:00:03

Ecclesiastes is one of the sources that shows us just how empty all of our learning, all of our searching, all of the things that we think we can find in life shows us just how empty all of it is without Him.

01:00:14

None of the things that this life can promise fulfills all the things that they promise. They may promise happiness, they may promise success, but we live in a broken world. We live in a fallen world where sickness comes and ruins happy moments in life.

01:00:28

We live in a world where natural disasters happen. We live in a world where there's this constant fighting. If you turn on the news for like two minutes, all we, it feels like all we hear is just broken, broken, broken, bad, the senseless violence that continues to break out, that more news continues to come in and more news continues to come in.

01:00:47

The world that we live in is messed up, right? I think any of us would be willing to acknowledge the fact that this world that we live in is messed up. It's the reason, the reason for that is that at the very beginning of this book, God created a perfect world and we got two chapters of it before people showed up and ruined it, right?

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We got two chapters where God said, created it and said it was good and God created it and said it was good and then God created Adam and Eve and said, all right, you got one rule. Eh, we're gonna do what we want, what we think is best, and it broke the world and it set death into place and it sent this brokenness that we see.

01:01:23

It sent all of these things that we look at and we go, you know, this world is just, it's just not enough. It's just not what we hope that it would be sometimes. I think this book of Ecclesiastes is here because God wants to expose the meaninglessness of this life and use it to create a desire for more.

01:01:45

It's what Romans chapter eight talks about. I wanna invite you guys to turn over. We got a big chunk that we're gonna read from Romans chapter eight. So hang a right, go about halfway to two thirds of the way through to the back of the book.

01:01:57

You can follow along on the screens if you don't wanna make the turn there real quick but we're gonna read from Romans chapter eight. Romans chapter eight talks about this idea. It talks about the fact that the brokenness that we see in this world, the brokenness that we see in ourselves, it causes us to crave to long after more.

01:02:15

We're gonna read Romans eight verses 18 through 25. I think I hear most of the pages done turning. Give you guys just a second to get there. Romans chapter eight, it says, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

01:02:38

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

01:02:55

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits

of the spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, for the redemption of our bodies.

01:03:12

For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes in what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. I think we read these verses and we see it.

01:03:28

It talks about the fact that even creation itself goes, "things aren't right." Things are broken. We live in a world that's just messed up. We live in this world and we look at it and the world itself is groaning and acknowledges the brokenness.

01:03:43

People look at the world and look at our existence and look at the way that all these things leave us empty and we quickly acknowledge the brokenness in the same way that the preacher does in Ecclesiastes.

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It's the reason why in the midst of this whole book that talks about not enough, not enough, never gonna fulfill you, never going to make you happy. All these things that we see throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, all of them leave us empty, leave us wanting more.

01:04:09

This search for meaning is never gonna be found in all the places that the preacher in Ecclesiastes was able to look and point to. But we get to the end of the book and he gives us the answer. We spend 11 and a half chapters going, that's not it, that's not it, that's not it.

01:04:25

And we get to the end and it's like, man, you could have just given us the answer at the beginning and saved us all a little bit of wrestling through Ecclesiastes, right? So you gotta come back in four months for us to actually preach on that.

01:04:36

But I'm gonna give you guys the shortcut now. Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, the end of the matter after all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the wholeness. This is the whole duty of man.

01:04:49

That phrase, whole duty, it means like wholeness or fullness, it means that this is the way that we are ultimately what we were supposed to be. This is the thing that fulfills us. This is the thing that gives us meaning.

01:05:01

This is what we've been looking for for the last 11 and a half chapters and we couldn't find it anywhere else. You looked in all the other places and they left you empty. This is what it's all about. Fear God and keep his commandments. We look at existence under the sun on earth, human existence and it leaves us empty. But we, it's important for us at the end of the book as we see this. Oh, there's a God that lives above the sun.

01:05:26

Oh, there's more to this world than just the stuff that we chase after. When we take our eyes off of our stuff, when we take our lives off of humanity, when we take our lives off of whatever it is that we're gonna chase after, wisdom this week, and we fix them on Jesus.

01:05:42

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the author of our faith, that Jesus is the perfecter of our faith, that Jesus is the one that gives us meaning, that Jesus is the one that comes into our life and gives us a fullness.

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Jesus came and he said, I have come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly. Some translations say that you might have it to the fullest. That's what Jesus came for and that's not the existence of what the preacher in Ecclesiastes is talking about but I hope that's the existence that you have an understanding of.

01:06:12

The fact that Jesus came, that Jesus lived a perfect life, that Jesus died on a cross to pay a penalty that he didn't deserve means that we can now be forgiven, that we can have a relationship with God and that we can have the meaning that nothing else in this life is ever going to bring us, that nothing else is ever going to fulfill.

01:06:30

So if you have that, man, leave here today with a smile on your face, not a frown because what the preacher in Ecclesiastes is talking about, that's not our existence. We don't have to look at life and go, we get to life and go, we get to look at life and go, man, God gives meaning to all these places where there is no meaning.

01:06:50

God gives a purpose. God gives joy in all these places where there's just darkness. God gives wisdom in all these places where there's madness and folly. God gives in all the places where the world leaves us empty and that's the reason why as we leave here today, if you have that, if you know that, if you know Jesus, you get to leave here with a smile on your face, not a frown even after we read Depressing Ecclesiastes this week,

01:07:14

right? And if you haven't, if you don't realize that, there's many people, right? I look around the room and there's a bunch of faces that I don't recognize, I haven't gotten to know you yet. If you don't have that, and don't leave here today without it.

01:07:29

There's nothing that you could do today that would be more meaningful, that would be more impactful, that would totally radically change your life than to realize the hope that we have in scripture, the hope that we have in Jesus.

01:07:42

The fact that even though this world is empty, God is not. So if you don't have that, if you don't have that answer this morning, please don't leave here without it. We'll wait, right? So our prayer team is gonna be down here after the service.

01:07:56

They would love to chat with you and talk with you and be able to share a little bit of that. I'll be around and would love to chat with you and share those details with you as well. And in just a moment, we're gonna pray, but we're also gonna take communion.

01:08:09

We're gonna celebrate the fact that we get to have this new relationship with God, that we get to have this meaningful, valuable relationship with God through the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

01:08:19

And so as we take a few moments to remember the sacrifice of Jesus, I hope that you picked up your communion elements on the way in. If you didn't kind of peek your hand up or Linda's got a tray with some extras there that she'll bring around to you.

01:08:32

But as we think about this idea of communion, this is a meaningful time that Christians, that we as believers that have placed our faith in Jesus, the Bible tells us that if we are believers, if we have come to life through faith in Jesus, that we are supposed to regularly take these elements together and remember and celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made to remember the meaningful thing that Jesus did when he went to the cross and gave of his body,

01:09:01

that his body was broken for us, that his blood was spilled out for us. And as he did that, Jesus told us that the night before he was crucified, that was all instituting a new covenant. It was a new covenant that was actually talked about years earlier in the Old Testament in the book of Jeremiah.

01:09:21

So let me read from Jeremiah 31 as we prepare our hearts for communion this weekend. Jeremiah 31 is where God promises to initiate this new covenant with his people. And I think it's this beautiful reminder for us of the way that the world, that the way that the old covenant, that the way that our own efforts are broken before God.

01:09:40

But you know what, but God stepped in. But God said that he would make a covenant that wasn't dependent on us doing, it was dependent on him doing. Our standing before God is no longer dependent on what we do, but instead it's dependent on what Jesus already did.

01:09:55

All we have to do is receive his gift of salvation by faith in Jesus alone, by his grace. So let me read for us from Jeremiah 31, then we're gonna pray and I'll invite you to take the elements where you're seated.

01:10:07

Jeremiah 31, verses 31 through 34. It says, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

01:10:22

My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts.

01:10:36

I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me. From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

01:10:47

For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Thank you, Jesus, right? Let's pray and I'll invite you to take the elements. God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this incredible promise that you have given to us that you bring meaning where there is no meaning, that you bring hope where there is no hope, that you brought life into me where there was no life.

01:11:13

God, I may have been physically walking around, but spiritually, I was dead and you brought life through the power of your spirit. God, through your work in my heart, God, you are the one that deserves all the glory.

01:11:24

And God, we thank you for this new covenant. We thank you for the way that you reached out by your grace, by your mercy, by your goodness to us. You came and you made a way for us to know you. And you made a way for us to have meaning and purpose where there previously was none.

01:11:40

So God, as we remember the sacrifice of Jesus this morning, God, we celebrate the fact that this has nothing to do with us, but you, in your incredible mercy, chose to show favor to undeserving people like me.

01:11:56

God, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his sacrifice. We thank you for the cross where his body was broken so that we could be forgiven, where his blood was spilled out so that we could be made right, that we could be justified in your sight.

01:12:08

So God, as we take a few moments and remember the sacrifice of Jesus, God, we pray that you would stir our affections towards you. God, help us to remember and to experience the joy of our salvation as we remember the sacrifice of Jesus. So God, we give this time to you and we worship you for all that you do for us. We thank you, amen. Take and eat.