

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 Discussion Questions

Outline of Pastor Mike's Sermon

Intro

- Yale's class on [Happiness](#)
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 - Why Ecclesiastes?
 - The Meaning of Meaningless
 - Why Work

Why Ecclesiastes?

- 3 Reasons
 - What is worth pursuing? What will endure?
 - Letting the Scriptures speak to us in a different voice.
 - *The neighborhoods of Ecclesiastes are filled with wisdom streets. Many Christians have grown up traveling the prophetic roads of the Old Testament and the Pauline highways of the New Testament. Wisdom highways are less traveled. The Song of Solomon is like a back-road brothel to us . . . Job is like a long stretch of desert road with no night light and no gas stations or rest stops for miles. People can get stuck out there with no help, so we rarely travel there without a great deal of preparation . . . Ecclesiastes sounds like a crazed man downtown. He smells like he hasn't bathed—looks like it too—and as we pass by he won't stop glaring at us and beckoning to us that our lives are built on illusions, and that we are all going to die. So, most of us choose to get our lunch at a different shop on a less dreary corner of town. - Zach Eswine, Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes*
 - #3 end of message

The Meaning of Meaningless (v.1-2)

- Repetition creates the superlative
- *Hebel*- 39 times in Ecclesiastes
 - Jeremiah 16.19- the absurdity of idols
 - Psalms 39.5-6

Why Work? (v.3-11)

- Labor all of human endeavor

- Gain- profit, advantage, benefit
- Verses 5-7
 - Observations of nature- sun, wind, rivers active, yet bound to return to the starting point
 - Compared to human effort- active yet bound to repetition
- v. 8- no fulfillment
- Under the sun- 29 times in Ecc.
 - Refers to the time and limits the human experience

Implications

- Reason 3- the world around us needs a theology capable of handling the reality, in which they live.
 - Romans 8.18-25
 - The world is longing for something greater than what they experience under the sun
 - We are called to not just to give answers, but feel the weight of the question

Discussion Questions

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1. What struck you or surprised you about this passage?

2. Pastor Mike explained that the Hebrew word being translated as “vanity” or “meaningless” in most translations literally means “vapor” or “smoke.” And so, that author’s basic point is that these things that he calls “vanity” are like smoke in that they are there but we can’t really get a hold of them—when we try to grab on to them they just slip through our fingers. And so they are fleeting and can seem absurd because they are elusive and enigmatic.
 - a. What things does the Preacher say are “enigmatic” in this text? What aspect of our lives does he point to here?

 - b. Why does the Preacher feel like our “toil”—everything we do—is a waste of time? What reasons does he give?

3. How does reading and thinking about this affect you?

4. If you were in a conversation with the “Preacher” how would you respond to him?

5. Remember that “toiling” is part of the curse in Genesis chapter three when man sinned. And God, in Christ, has addressed the effects of the fall in our world. And so, God redeems those things that apart from him seem meaningless and absurd. While we can’t make anything new, he can and he does all the time: we are new creations in Christ, he gives us new birth, a new name, a new identity, and he will make a new heaven and earth, just to list a few examples.

a. What specific areas of your life has God redeemed or made new?

b. What parts of your life right now feel like meaningless or absurd “toil” that still need to be redeemed?

c. How does gospel truth speak to this area for you?

d. How can you do a better job of walking in this truth?