

VOTC 1 – Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 “When Life Feels Meaningless”

I remember first reading the book of Ecclesiastes as a teenager when I was learning about Christianity, and I remember being struck by how honest this book was. The book seemed so candid. So raw. So, human in one sense. And as a young man thinking through some of the bigger questions of life for the first time, I was drawn to this book for these reasons.

Sometimes as Christians, there is a gap between what we believe and what we experience, this can lead us to doubt the promises of God, and functionally operate as if God didn't exist.

Ecclesiastes calls this *life under the sun*. He teaches us through his own experience the futility of life when it is lived this way, and how we must fear the Lord.

Here we see a shocking introduction. At the start, this is what he wants to say. Other translations say “utterly meaningless.” OR “absolute futility”

Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher will use this word, *vain*, over 35 x's. It's the Hebrew word, *hevel*, and it can be translated: *vapor* or *breath*.

Hebel can speak to the transience of life, but it also points to life's futility. Life can be like *smoke* or the *wind*, you can't quite grasp meaning in life on your own. It eludes you. It frustrates you.

As we hear this introduction, we see that God would have us **feel the real frustration** of life this side of heaven. We like things to be neat & tidy. We like formulas. In Proverbs you get the general truth of how life should operate in this world, with a few exceptions. For example. **Prov. 22:6**, *train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* **Prov. 10:27**, *“the fear of the LORD prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.”*

Ecclesiastes shows us that life is not a perfect formula. Sometimes, the righteous die young. Sometimes, those raised in the church walk away. Sometimes, the health young man or woman who looks after their health gets terminal diagnosis.

Life is *not* utter chaos, but it is also *not* a perfect formula. In this world, even the godliest of saints can find themselves saying, vanity of vanities!

We are living in hard times right now that don't always make sense. You hope that if you followed the right formula, you wouldn't end up sick or in the hospital, or in lockdown, but sometimes it feels like our efforts are a striving after the wind. The preacher goes on to describe how vanity is seen in the world around us. 1st he says

Life is repetitive. Sometimes life just feels repetitive and monotonous at times. One generation comes and goes, but the earth stays the same. We were made to live forever on the earth, but instead we pass away while the earth stays the same

2nd, he says later there is nothing new under the sun! Of course, there are new inventions and technology. But for all of our so-called progress, there is never a point where we can say as humans, “it's enough. I'm satisfied.” We always need more.

Moreover, nothings new in our struggles. We endure the same weather patterns, we struggle to provide, we battle against sickness & plagues & wars, old age, & we have the same human limitations. Third, he says....

Everything full of weariness. Our lives are often marked by weariness in the *home*, at *work*, or even at *church*. Sometimes it just feels like we are spinning our wheels, and not really going anywhere. Greek mythology – maybe you’ve heard of **Sisyphus**. He is a man condemned to repeat the same meaningless task over & over w/out end. He rolls a boulder up a mountain only to watch it roll down again. Then he pushes it back up again & again w/ no end in sight

Finally, the preacher says we are never satisfied (v.8), “the eye is not sissified with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” With our *eyes* we watch *movie* after *movie*, show after show, IG reels, FB videos, but are we full? With our *ears* we listen to podcasts, the news, the radio, but do we have life figured out? Well, if all of this is true, **where is significance found?**

Here we are reminded that **if we keep our gaze only on this world, life will be meaningless and restless for us**. Therefore, must fix our eyes beyond the horizon of this present world to God our Creator, and to our redeemer, Jesus Christ

The NT affirms what Ecclesiastes is saying here about the vanity of life. Paul writes in **Rom. 8:20:21**, *For the creation was subjected to vanity, 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.*

When sin entered the world, human beings and creation together began to groan for redemption. This what Jesus came to accomplish for us!

Jesus came into this world of sorrow, frustration, and disappointment, and he came to give us life, and life more abundantly! In **Jn. 4** Jesus came to a spiritually thirsty woman who tried to find meaning in the world, and he offered to her himself as Living Water

***Jesus accomplished redemption for us by going to the cross where he would *groan* under the weight of our sin to bring that salvation that our hearts long for. And b/c of his life, death, and resurrection, we are not stuck spinning our wheels today – but Jesus offers to us new start, a new heart, a new covenant, a new purpose, & a new home where *he promises to make all things new* (**Rev. 21:1,5**). History is *not cyclical*, but it is *linear*, and it is leading to a GLORIOUS end in Christ!

May we all listen to the words of the preacher and look beyond this horizon of this present world to Christ, the one seated at God’s right hand. May we know that if we belong to Jesus today by faith, our life is secure in him, and our labors for God not in vain.

We hope you’ll join us next time here at VOTC as we continue search for the meaning of life. Until then, may God bless you and keep you.