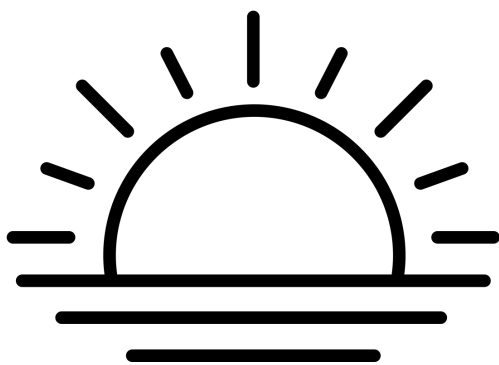


Read through the Bible



Ecclesiastes Week 2



Monday, September Twenty-First

Food is a good reminder that our bodies crave balance. If we don't eat enough, our stomachs growl and we start to become lightheaded. On the other hand, if we eat too much, our stomachs ache and we start to become nauseous. But if we eat a moderate amount of food, our bodies tend to thrive. In today's passage, Solomon looks at a world filled with extremes and finds solace in balance.

Read: Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What situation did Solomon witness, and what was his response to it? (see verses 15-18)

Throughout his lifetime, Solomon witnessed righteous people suffer and wicked people prosper. His response? Live a balanced life. Don't be overly righteous and don't be overly wicked.

- What does Solomon understand about the human condition? (see verse 20)
- What does Solomon reveal about the nature of gossip and slander? (see verses 21-22)

Throughout our lifetime, we all have spoken poorly about other people behind their backs. But in verses 21-22, Solomon puts forth an important insight – people are likely speaking poorly about us behind our backs too! This is the indiscriminate nature of gossip and slander.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Paul gives us this direction in Ephesians 4:29 - *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* How might you better use your words to build people up instead of giving in to the temptation to gossip? Take some time to bring your thoughts to God in prayer.

Tuesday, September Twenty-Second

Ever hurricane season, ABC Action News meteorologist Denis Philips is flooded with a variety of concerns from viewers. Because of their anxious inquiries, Denis developed what he calls Rule #7 – “Stop freaking out...until I tell you to. We're fine.” At the heart of his rule is the idea that because we cannot control the future (in this case, the path of a hurricane), we shouldn't be anxious about it until we actually need to be. In today's passage, Solomon talks about our inability to control the future.

Read: Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What effect does wisdom have on a person? (see verse 1)
- What does Solomon say regarding our ability to control future events? (see verses 7-8)

These verses are a good reminder that as much as we may try to control our future, we are largely powerless to do so. We can certainly control some “micro” aspects of our lives (e.g. making sure you get to your appointment on time), but, as Solomon points out, we are fooling ourselves if we think we can control some of the more “macro” parts of our lives.

- What happens when the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out? (see verse 11)
- According to Solomon, can a person truly know everything? (see verses 16-17)

After all of the wisdom that he had gained, Solomon concludes that a person cannot know everything. In this sense, we should be wary of those who claim to have all of the answers. As Solomon points out, even if they claim to understand it all, they can't really comprehend it (v. 17).

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Think of a current situation that is outside of your control. Take some time in prayer to turn this situation over to God.

Wednesday, September Twenty-Third

“C'mon, mom! Just let me go to the party.” “I'm sorry, Ricky, but if there are not going to be any adults there to supervise you all, I can't let you go.” “This is so ridiculous! You just want to kill all of my opportunities for fun.” “That's not true, Ricky. I just want to keep you safe. Years from now when you have your own kids, you will look back and understand the wisdom in what I'm saying.” In today's passage, Solomon speaks to the value of wisdom.

Read: Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- According to Solomon, what do humans not know? (see verses 1-2)
- How do Jesus' words in Matthew 5:12 serve as a response to Solomon's conclusion in verses 5-6?

Because God Himself came into the world and revealed His plan of salvation to us by dying on the cross for our sins, we don't have to arrive at Solomon's conclusion today. Instead, we can look forward to the future with hope and assurance as we await the day when Christ will come again, and when we will experience the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!

- How do Solomon's words in verse 11 speak against his words in 7:13 and 9:1?

Even though everything is in God's hands (9:1), sometimes, it can feel like things are left up to time and chance (9:11). As Solomon searched to understand the meaning of life, he likely came across many moments where he found this observation to be true.

- How are we to respond to the wisdom of others? (see verse 17)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Think back to the situation outside of your control from yesterday. Now that you've taken it to God, consider talking about your situation with someone who can provide insight and wisdom.

Thursday, September Twenty-Fourth

If you walk into a Home Goods or a TJMaxx, you'll likely come across a section of wall art that tastefully displays a variety of wise sayings. For example, you might come across a large canvas that says, "Before healing others, heal yourself," or you might find a small placard to hang above your door that says, "Home is the starting place of love, hope, and dreams." In today's passage, Solomon provides us with a variety of wise sayings.

Read: Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What happens when someone with wisdom and honor engages in a bit of folly? (see verse 1)

Warren Buffett once said, "It takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it." What does this say about how forgiving (or unforgiving) we are as people?

- How are calmness and tranquility helpful in a heated situation? (see verse 4)

A powerful antidote for someone's anger is to approach them with calmness and tranquility. Jesus reminds us of the benefit of this approach in Matthew 5:9 – "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

- According to Solomon, what can happen when our thoughts toward others are not pure? (see verse 20)

Ever wonder where the phrase "A little bird told me..." comes from? Many historians attribute the origins of this phrase to this very verse from Ecclesiastes. The idea behind it is both informative and cautionary – word travels fast!

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

The next time somebody directs their anger toward you, instead of responding in a similar fashion, consciously seek peace by presenting an attitude of calmness and tranquility.

Friday, September Twenty-Fifth

Unless you are a wealth manager or enjoy watching CNBC, chances are that financial planning is not high on your priority list. Sure, you know it's important to plan for your future, but how often do you consciously consider all that can be done to set you up for financial success for years to come? In today's passage, Solomon talks about the importance of planning.

Read: Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How do verses 1-3 speak to the notion that the future is unpredictable, and thus, we need to plan for whatever may come our way?
- How does verse 5 speak to the notion that there are limits to human knowledge?

After meticulously examining the world around him, Solomon realized that there are just some things that humans cannot understand. Instead, we must surrender those things to God, trusting in His mighty and gracious ways.

- What advice does Solomon give to those who are young? (see verses 9-10)

Solomon had seen a lot throughout his lifetime. And he had also determined that the things he once found value in – power, wealth, work, advancement, pleasures – had failed to truly satisfy him. However, he encourages the young to be happy and enjoy the days of their youth. Perhaps he doesn't want to spoil their fun. Or perhaps he simply misses the days when he didn't see everything as meaningless. As we delve into the final chapter over the next two days, we shall see whether or not Solomon has evolved from his initial thesis in 1:2 that "everything is meaningless."

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Before we head into the final chapter, consider what you might say to someone who believes (like Solomon) that life is meaningless.

Saturday, September Twenty-Six

The internet is filled with advice. The Today Show website, for example, has a whole page called “Things I Wish I Knew” in which advice is given on a variety of topics. Planning a wedding? Check out “5 Things I Wish I Knew Before My Wedding.” Have a daughter? Read up on “9 Things I Wish I Had Known About Raising a Daughter.” Trying to get into college? Brush up by checking out “8 Things to Know about the College Admissions Waiting Game.” Oftentimes, articles like these are aimed at younger people so as to provide them with “lessons learned” on a specified subject. In today’s passage, Solomon has some advice and “lessons learned” for the young people out there.

Read: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How does Solomon refer to God in verse 1?

Solomon gives a relational term in verse 1 to describe God: He is our Creator. Perhaps he is coming around to the idea that there are some things in this world that are actually meaningful (i.e. his relationships with God and with people – look back at 4:8-12).

- According to Solomon, what should people do in the days of their youth? (see verse 1)

It is interesting that amidst his conclusion of meaninglessness, Solomon cautions young people to remember God and acknowledge the reality that eternity had been put in their hearts (see 3:11). In this sense, he seems to suggest that there *is* something meaningful amidst a rather meaningless existence.

- When does Solomon say we should remember God? (see verses 6-7)

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

Take some time today to thank God – your Creator – for making you and for being with you in all seasons of your life.

Sunday, September Twenty-Seven

In the final passage of Ecclesiastes, Solomon comes to a rather surprising conclusion. The conclusion itself may not be surprising for Christians today, but it likely was for his readers back then.

Read: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What did Solomon do with his wisdom? (see verses 9-10)
- How does Solomon caution us against endlessly pursuing wisdom? (see verse 12)
- After writing all that he wrote, what does Solomon ultimately conclude? (see verses 13-14)

Ultimately, Solomon concludes that a life without God is truly meaningless, but a life with Him is just the opposite. Michael Eaton, a scholar on Ecclesiastes, explains this surprising conclusion: *“Through this book the Preacher carefully thought through (and lived through) a premise commonly held: of life lived without consideration of eternity and the eternal God. After all that, he comes to this conclusion – and challenges all those who continue holding to the premise he held through most all the book. What would it be like, asks the Preacher, if things were utterly different from what you thought? What if this world is not the ultimate one? What if God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him?”*

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

In light of Solomon’s conclusion in verses 13-14 and in light of the Gospel, write out – in one sentence – the meaning of life.

Well, that’s the end of Ecclesiastes! I pray your time in God’s Word has filled you with newfound perspective as you reflected upon the meaning of life. It has truly been a pleasure reading along with you! Happy Fall, and I’ll be back this Advent season with our next book of the Bible...Hosea! – Pastor Chris

Questions? Comments? Contact Pastor Chris at chris.futch@oursaviorfl.org or (727) 344-2684.