

June 2023

What's the Point...of Ecclesiastes? Mark Garner

The book of Ecclesiastes is somewhat unusual, and it can be easily misunderstood. Yet it can help us understand some aspects of our relationship with God, and can help us with our walk of faith in this world. In Ecclesiastes, we see the thoughts of someone (understood to be Solomon) as he looks back on his own mistakes and tries to make sense of what he has experienced.

Overview Of Ecclesiastes

The young Solomon had walked closely with God, yet when he became famous and powerful, he began to drift away from our Heavenly Father, as is also described in 1 Kings. As Ecclesiastes begins, he looks back, with regrets and with new understanding, as he tells us about his descent into meaninglessness (Ecclesiastes 1-2).

The king considers how generations come and go, the ongoing rising and setting of the sun, while there is nothing new. He describes how he has used his position to undertake "great projects" and to amass immense amounts of gold, herds, servants, and other possessions, hoping to find deeper meaning and satisfaction in these things by themselves. Yet instead he was discouraged.

Solomon considers what it means that God has set eternity in our hearts while we live in a temporary world (Ecclesiastes 3). The memorable scripture about "a time for everything . . . under the heavens" describes the wide variety of things that take place every day all over the world, and it helps us see our need to look for lasting meaning in something far bigger than ourselves.

In spite of all the seeming randomness in this world, God is always present, and he gives meaning to our everyday lives when we stay close with him. During good times God rejoices with us, during bad times he comforts and teaches us, and at all times he guides and shows us kindness.

The next section of the book continues looking at many of the things that happen in this life, as Solomon puts it "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 4-10). He has seen many things that don't seem to make sense, and human knowledge has fallen short of explaining them. He also makes some observations about human nature, such as our tendency to 'chase the wind' by trying to find in the wrong places the enduring hope, meaning, and peace that can only come from knowing God.

As the book comes to the "conclusion of the matter" (Ecclesiastes 11-12), Solomon looks at more of the ways how going by this world's thinking and reasoning can lead us astray. Then the king finally comes back to what he had already learned long ago, that it is best to walk humbly by faith in God, so that our Heavenly Father can meet our deepest needs, as well as helping us find joy and contentment in the blessings he gives us in this life.

Overall Thoughts

Some parts of Ecclesiastes may at first sound discouraging, yet this reflects the disappointment of someone who had drifted away from the God who had abundantly blessed him. The book is a reminder to remain close to God and walk in the light of Jesus, so that our lives won't seem meaningless or empty, and so that instead we can have the peace, hope, and contentment our Heavenly Father wants to give us all.

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What's the Point...of Ecclesiastes? Caleb Dillinger

I'm about to explain the point of reading a book that begins by saying, "There is no point." Literally. Verse 2 of the book says "Vanity of vanities, all is vanities!" Or, depending on your translation, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless!" How can there be meaning to a book that says otherwise? Let me explain. Ecclesiastes has no confirmed author, aside from verse 1 of the book "The preacher, the son of David." But based on the content of the book, it's widely attributed to King Solomon the Wise, who, after forsaking his wisdom and choosing a thousand women partners, made some poor spiritual choices. He had money, he had fame, he had sex and pleasure and prestige. But he squandered what he had.

The premise of Ecclesiastes is that everything on earth is indeed meaningless if it's not tied to a greater purpose (i.e. faith). Hard work, good fun, all one can accomplish is meaningless if it is done for self and not for God. Ecclesiastes 3:14 sums it up well: "Whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it." Yet whatever mankind does is never new, and it always fades away! Mankind's life and work will fail, yet the work and plan of God endures forever.

The book continues to look at the hardships of life. Good, righteous people perish, whereas wicked men keep on living (Ecclesiastes 7:15). That's something you'll still hear said today! Why do the good suffer and the wicked prosper? It's not fair! If you've ever struggled with those thoughts, you share the same struggles this author experienced! But much like the Psalmists, the author recognizes everyone eventually dies. The wicked will perish, the wealthy will perish, and things will then be in the hands of God (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

So, the writer concludes his book reflecting on the meaningless of life by calling upon people to fear God and keep God's commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). If you focus on pleasing people, you'll struggle. If you focus on pleasing yourself, you'll struggle, but if you focus on pleasing God, you'll entrust your soul to the one who judges with righteousness and wisdom beyond that of any man and any leader.

So, what's the point of Ecclesiastes? I hope you're realizing it's the book of the Bible pessimists needed, realists needed, and even optimists needed. It's the book of the Bible meant to humble all people and remind us God is in control, and if we seek to be in control, we can be sure to have meaningless experiences. That is the point of Ecclesiastes.