

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Teaching (45 minutes)

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Name of the Book

The book's name comes from the idea that the book was spoken in the assembly. The Hebrew word for this is Qohelet, translated as "The Preacher" or "The Teacher." We get the title of Ecclesiastes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Greek word for assembly is Ekklesia.

Author

The classical view of authorship relies on internal evidence and considers King Solomon to have written the book. However, some scholars challenge Solomonic authorship because the book seems to have been written by Qohelet, who refers to himself. Most Bible versions translate Qohelet as the Preacher or Teacher. See the Date for further evidence of non-Solomonic authorship.

It's possible Solomon is the author because he may have taken the sayings of Qohelet and compose them the book we now have as Ecclesiastes. Arguments against Solomon being the author are that it doesn't seem Qohelet presents the material as a king.

Audience

The audience of Ecclesiastes is the assembly to which the Teacher is speaking. If the date of the book is later than traditionally accepted, it would be part of the wisdom and poetry literature read by people returning from exile. Secondly, it is for anyone who wants to know the meaning of life from the experienced and much older Solomon, or Qohelet.

Date

Depending on the author and situation, dates range from an early date of 1000-931 BC to a later date of 250 BC. Earlier dates place the time of writing around the time of Solomon while later dates suggest that the language of the book is later Hebrew. Some of the language of the book seems to be Hebrew with Persian influence from the exile.

The argument for the language has been contested by many in recent scholarly material. It is generally understood that early dates reflect conservative scholarship while the dates reflect liberal scholarship.

Purpose

To discover the meaning of life through the experience and evaluation of different approaches and their quality and ultimate fulfillment.

Themes

- Comparing a life lived without the fear of the Lord.
- Realizing the emptiness of enterprises in life without God.
- Enjoying life well-lived for the glory of God.

The Most Important Word

The Teacher uses the word for vanity (Heb: hevel) 38 times (72x Total) throughout the book. It's important to understand what this word means because he uses it so much for every situation he tries.

It is connected to the word for vapor or breath. That's why we can understand it to mean empty or worthless. Something that does not last.

In other passages and contexts, it can mean prideful or to deceive someone by filling them with false hopes. In Ecclesiastes, it means the emptiness and vanity of fruitless efforts that don't last.

No matter what the Teacher tries throughout his life, he finds it empty on its own. His pursuits are worthless to him because they may provide momentary pleasure or a sense of worth but they did not last.

Ecclesiastes Part A: (Ecclesiastes 1:1-6:12)

The Great Experiment ([Ecclesiastes 1](#))

Section 1: All Is Vanity ([Ecclesiastes 1:1-11](#))

Ecclesiastes 1:9–11 ESV

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

This famous opening of Ecclesiastes has the Teacher proclaiming that everything under the sun is vanity, or empty. He claims that every enterprise of a person leads to nothing. If you are looking for a happy-go-lucky book, pick a different one.

Section 2: Testing Life Experiences with Wisdom ([Ecclesiastes 1:12-18](#))

Ecclesiastes 1:16–18 ESV

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. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

King Solomon decides that because he has the resources and means, he will experiment with all kinds of endeavors of man to see if any of them provides lasting enjoyment and is worthwhile.

Testing Pleasure, Wisdom, and Work ([Ecclesiastes 2](#))

Test 1: Pleasure ([Ecclesiastes 2:1-11](#))

The first test to see if life can be worth it is to live a pleasurable life. “Pleasure” does not mean Solomon did nothing else. In fact, he worked hard and was profitable and productive. But he considered pleasure and entertainment his just rewards for such hard work.

Verdict: Vanity. Ultimately, enjoyment and entertainment did not retain long-term happiness or success.

Test 2: Wisdom ([Ecclesiastes 2:12-17](#))

Ecclesiastes 2:13–15 *ESV*

Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

This is a hard passage for many people. Solomon is not saying that wisdom is worthless. He is saying that the same things that happen to fools happen to wise people. But he still agrees that wisdom is better than folly.

Verdict: Vanity. No matter how you live with wisdom or folly, everyone dies.

Test 3: Work ([Ecclesiastes 2:18-26](#))

Solomon says that work is worthless because everything a person works to gain or to give to someone else will not be his. Why work so hard so that someone else can enjoy the fruits of your labor?

Verdict: Vanity. You work for someone else to gain. Work alone is not worth the effort.

Knowing the Times ([Ecclesiastes 3](#))

A Season for Everything ([Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#))

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 *ESV*

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Solomon sees that there is a season (time) to every part of life. We do not experience all these things all at once. We experience some things now and some things later. Everything has its place.

Always Working ([Ecclesiastes 3:9-15](#))

Work is a gift from God and we should enjoy hard work that we do. Sadly, many people are working in a job they don't like, and so they hate work. But God has given work for us to enjoy. We need to find the kind of work we enjoy and do it with all our heart. Still, it is vanity in the end as Solomon has touched on already.

The Same End ([Ecclesiastes 3:16-22](#))

Ecclesiastes 3:21–22 ESV

Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Solomon talks about the lack of justice, that the wicked and the righteous do not get a head when there is injustice. However, everyone goes to the same end. It seems to be an open question about eternity.

Vanity under the Sun ([Ecclesiastes 4](#))

Life Sucks ([Ecclesiastes 4:1-3](#))

Ecclesiastes 4:1–3 ESV

Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Solomon observes that there is oppression and injustice in this life. He says it's even better not to be born or that those who are already dead are more fortunate than those who are still living.

Working Is Worthless ([Ecclesiastes 4:4-8](#))

Solomon says it is with us to work on your own when you have no one else to give the prosperity to. Work is worthless when it is for only you and you will not have time to enjoy it.

Don't Go It Alone ([Ecclesiastes 4:9-12](#))

This has a famous verse where someone says that a cord made of three will not be broken. He stresses that it is better for two people than one. The reference is to work, but it could be for anything. A life lived by yourself is empty.

Legacy and Inheritance Are Wasted ([Ecclesiastes 4:13-16](#))

Solomon says that people who are well known will not always be remembered. No matter what they do to make an inheritance or leave a legacy, it will eventually be empty.

Don't Waste Your Time ([Ecclesiastes 5:1-6:12](#))

Shut Your Mouth before God ([Ecclesiastes 5:1-7](#))

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 ESV

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

Solomon says it is worthless to challenge God before His presence. God knows more than you and is sovereign. You cannot argue your case. He decides what He decides.

Chasing Fortune Is a Dead End ([Ecclesiastes 5:8-17](#))

People who chase after fortune may have it for a time, but they cannot take it with them when they die. In the striving for wealth, more injustice and wickedness is done in the process.

Strategy: Settle for Enjoyment ([Ecclesiastes 5:18-20](#))

He contends that a person should be happy with their work and what it produces. A person should be happy with what God gives him instead of striving for more. Enjoy what you have in the work of your hands.

Lacking Enjoyment Leads Nowhere ([Ecclesiastes 6:1-12](#))

Solomon says that a person should enjoy what he has. I would add that you should enjoy the relationships you have. They are a gift from God. If we were them in our striving, we are not even living for ourselves. It is a waste of your life if you do not enjoy God's blessings.

Discussion (30 minutes)

Discussion Questions

How should we feel about work today according to Ecclesiastes?

Is there any benefit to pleasure in life and why?

How does Solomon view the afterlife?

Application (10 minutes)

Ecclesiastes for Life

What do you think is the meaning of life?

Is working hard for your whole life worth it? Why or why not?

Is there anything in your life right now we can provide wisdom for?