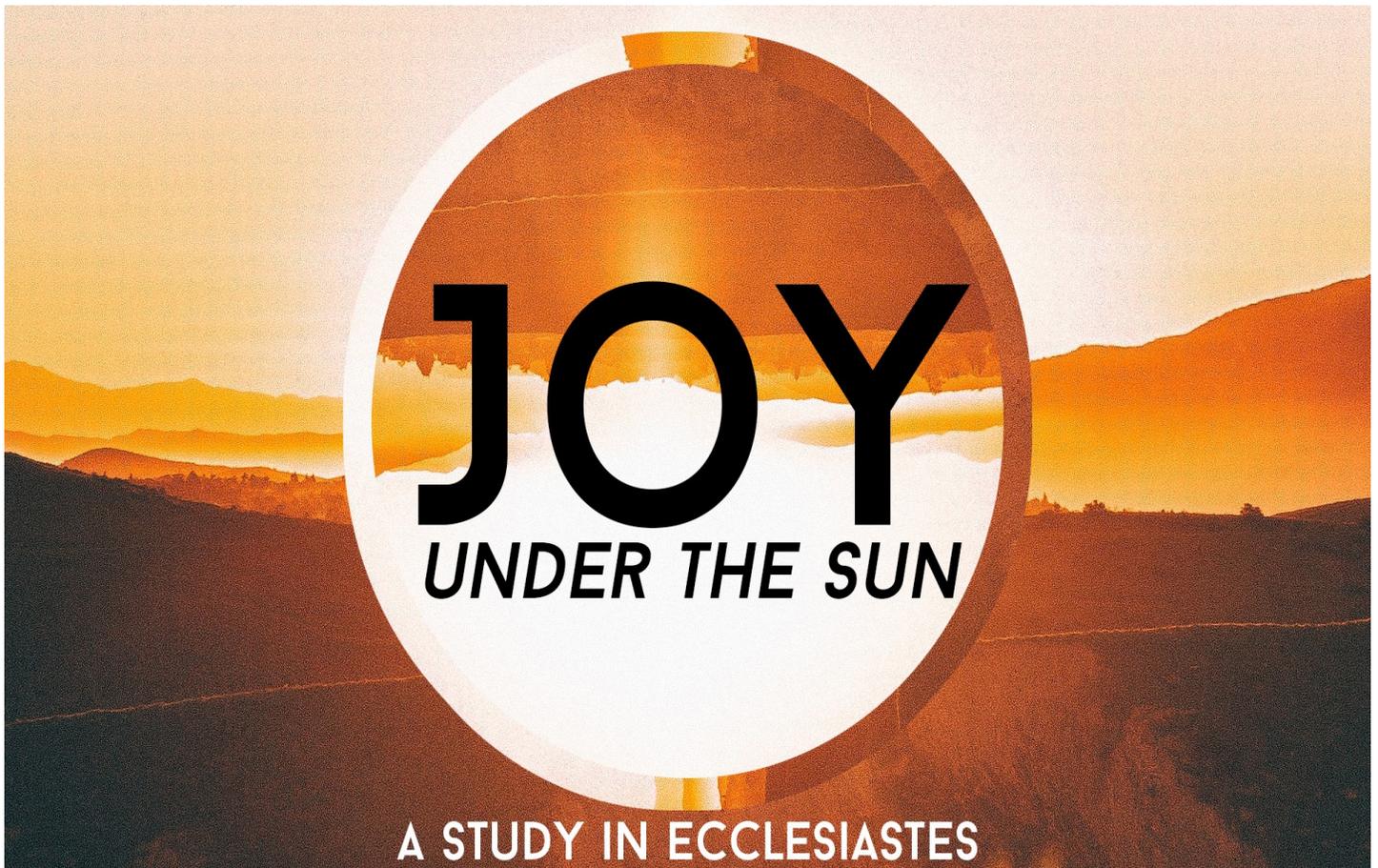


Rimrock Church

"A community being transformed by Jesus Christ."

Experience God ~ Embrace Grace ~ Engage Others



12200 West Highway 44
Rapid City, SD 57702
605-342-5373
rimrockchurch.com
office@rimrockchurch.com

Booklet Two
All Scripture is NIV

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him. ¹⁵ Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

From the beginning of chapter 1, Solomon is concluding his search on the meaning of this temporary life under the sun. Ecclesiastes is answering the key question of “What do workers gain from their toil?” Solomon has explored personal gain in knowledge, selfish-consumption, and hard work and found it wanting in providing ultimate meaning to life. He has explored Hedonism (pleasure in selfish consumption) and Nihilism (godless meaninglessness) but ultimately rejects these philosophies of life as a chasing after the wind. Instead of life as gain, Solomon introduces the idea of life as a gift from God at the end of chapter 2.

In chapter 3 verses 9-15, Solomon hammers home the idea of *life as a gift from God*. This is an introduction of worship of God and His grace! With God at the center of life we can enjoy the beauty of what He has made in each season of time in life (v.11). When God is worshiped, we are gifted with an eternal perspective (v. 11). When God is at the center of life, we can trust His goodness and not worry about figuring out all the questions in the complexity of life (v.11). With God at the center of life and the giver of all good gifts, we can enjoy and find happiness in the gifts that He gives in this temporary life (v.12-13). With God at the center of our worship we don't have to worry about gain or loss but rest in trust of who He is as the Creator and giver of all life (v.14).

Life with God is eternal life of joy! In verses 14-15 Solomon worships in the same way Paul does in Romans 11, “³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ³⁵Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? ³⁶For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

Discussion Questions:

1. How does our finite perspective in seasons of time (Ecc. 3:1-8) compare with God's eternal perspective of life outside of time? How does this perspective change how we see ourselves and how we understand God?
2. Describe trust in your own words. How is Ecclesiastes an invitation to trust in God amid the complexity of life?
3. How does trust in God change the way we live and face difficulty and complexity in life? Describe what this looks like in your own life?
4. Read Romans 11:33-36 and Romans 12:1-2. How does Jesus (the gospel) reveal the way we view trust and worship of God? How are these views to be applied to our lives?

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

¹⁶ And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. ¹⁷ I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.” ¹⁸ I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. ¹⁹ Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” ²² So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

As Solomon explores the meaning of life and concludes that we must rest in worship and trust in God, he still has some unanswered questions. The good news is that these very questions Solomon has are answered fully by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament story. In these verses Solomon is expressing his longing for a Messiah and Savior!

Here are the two issues that Solomon is grappling with:

1. How can humanity find righteousness and justice and when will God bring about this judgment?
2. Does death win? Does death have the final and last word on human and animal existence? Is there any hope of resurrection?

This is why Jesus came into the world, to answer these two questions. Jesus' primary purpose was to face death and justice head on at the cross and conquer death in His glorious resurrection. Jesus answers the first question with His work on the cross. Because of mankind's sinfulness we cannot escape the justice and righteousness of God. Jesus dying on the cross reveals the perfect love of God and the perfect justice of God. God's forgiveness and righteousness are now made available because of the perfect innocent blood that was spilled on behalf of sinful humanity.

Jesus' resurrection guarantees the victory of life over death! Paul says in 1 Corinthians that without the resurrection our faith is worthless. The resurrection is the fuel for our hope and the promise of God's salvation. God is truly making “everything beautiful in its time” in his resurrection power!

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you define justice? How have you seen a lack of justice and presence of wickedness in our world? What is the result of lack of justice in our world? How has this affected you personally?
2. What does it mean that God will judge every deed? Is that good news or bad news?
3. Read Romans 3:9-18. What is the human condition?
4. Read Romans 3:21-26. How does Jesus' work on the cross bring perfect justice to the world?
5. Read Romans 8:31-39 How does Jesus death and resurrection answer Solomon's question about justice and life after death?

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: saw the tears of the oppressed - and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors - and they have no comforter. ² And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. ³ But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. ⁴ And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ⁵ Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves. ⁶ Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. ⁷ Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: ⁸ There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless - a miserable business! ⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: ¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. ¹³ Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. ¹⁴ The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. ¹⁵ I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. ¹⁶ There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Solomon looked. How often do you take time to observe and really look at life? So often we focus on filling our lives with activity and pretending through life, that we never get around to really looking. Often, we are afraid to look. Solomon challenges us to stop pretending and really observe and examine life as it really is.

Here are some realities we need to look at.

1. The existence of oppression and abuse of power over people in our world (v.1-3).
2. The erroneous motivations of envy and comparison in trying to achieve success in life (v.4-5).
3. The power of loving relationships bring strength unlike any other in this temporary life under the sun (v.7-12).

The interesting thing about these three observations is they all have to do with how we relate to other people. Solomon is pointing out that relationships with other people matter.

When we look at and examine life, we begin to understand what really matters. Proverbs 1:7 reminds us that the "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". When we understand life is not about gain, but it is a gift of God, then we are free to fearlessly look at the reality of life and see our relationships in light of love and trust. This changes how we measure significance and meaning in this temporary life under the sun!

Discussion Questions:

1. The opposite of selfish-consumption is awareness of and interest in other people. How does this change our lives when we don't solely focus on ourselves and begin to truly see others around us?
2. What are some ways that giving relationships with others brings joy and strength to our lives?
3. Read Luke 10:25-37. How does Jesus in this story address Solomon's observations? How does Jesus fulfill Solomon's recognition of the power of love?

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

¹Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. ²Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. ³A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool. ⁴When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. ⁵It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. ⁶Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.

How do you worship? Knowing that life is a gift from God, we are invited into the life of worship. How we worship matters.

- Do you go through the motions but are never moved in your heart?
- Do you sing songs you don't really believe?
- Do you nod when the Scripture is read without considering what is being said?
- Have you found yourself declaring out loud love for God without intending to be obedient to Him?
- Are you quick to give money to God to impress people?
- Do like to pray in front of others but never get around to it when your alone?

Solomon calls this the sacrifice of fools. The fool publicly and verbally declares what is not true in their hearts and what they do not intend to fulfill.

Jesus said true worship is done in spirit and in truth. John 4 tells us this is what Father God seeks, true worshipers! This is what Solomon is inviting us to examine.

Are we foolish worshipers or true worshipers?

Discussion Questions:

1. According to these verses what should be our posture in worship? What is the difference between authentic humility and presumptive pride?
2. How would you describe the difference between worship from the heart versus performance worship?
3. Read Matthew 6:1; 7:24-27 and John 4:19-26 How does Jesus reveal what true worship is?

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9

⁸ If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. ⁹ The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. ¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. ¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? ¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep. ¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, ¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit. ¹⁵ Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands. ¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind? ¹⁷ All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. ¹⁸ This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

Chapter 6 - ¹ I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: ² God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil. ³ A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴ It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. ⁵ Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— ⁶ even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place? ⁷ Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied. ⁸ What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? ⁹ Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

If true worship of God and loving relationships with others is what brings us joy and happiness in this life under the sun, then we need to consider and weigh the importance of other things in light of these priorities. This is the context of the remainder of Chapter 5 and 6 of Ecclesiastes. This context helps us interpret these proverbs that Solomon shares with us in these chapters.

Most people have a fraught relationship with money. Either obsessed with gaining wealth or an unhealthy ignorance of money's importance in life. Solomon points out either extreme is detrimental to our joy and happiness in this life. Realizing that death knocks on the poor man and the rich man's door in the same way give each one a healthier perspective on the way we should view money in this life. The point is that money has meaning, but we must wake up to the reality that it is like vapor or smoke. It does not last.

Solomon's conclusion is to see wealth and possessions as gifts from God. When we understand money is not gain, but a gift, then we are freed up to

worship God with our wealth as stewards who give out of what has been given to us. The conclusion is then that this person is able to have God, "keep them occupied with gladness of heart".

Discussion Questions:

1. Examine your life to see if you have a healthy understanding of the role of money in your life. Do you over prioritize importance or under value its importance in your life?
2. Is it hard to talk about money with your family or with others? If so, why? Describe what a healthy relationship with money would look like in life?
3. Read Matthew 19:16-30 and Matthew 25:14-30. How does Jesus view money and the importance it has in our lives reflecting what we truly worship?