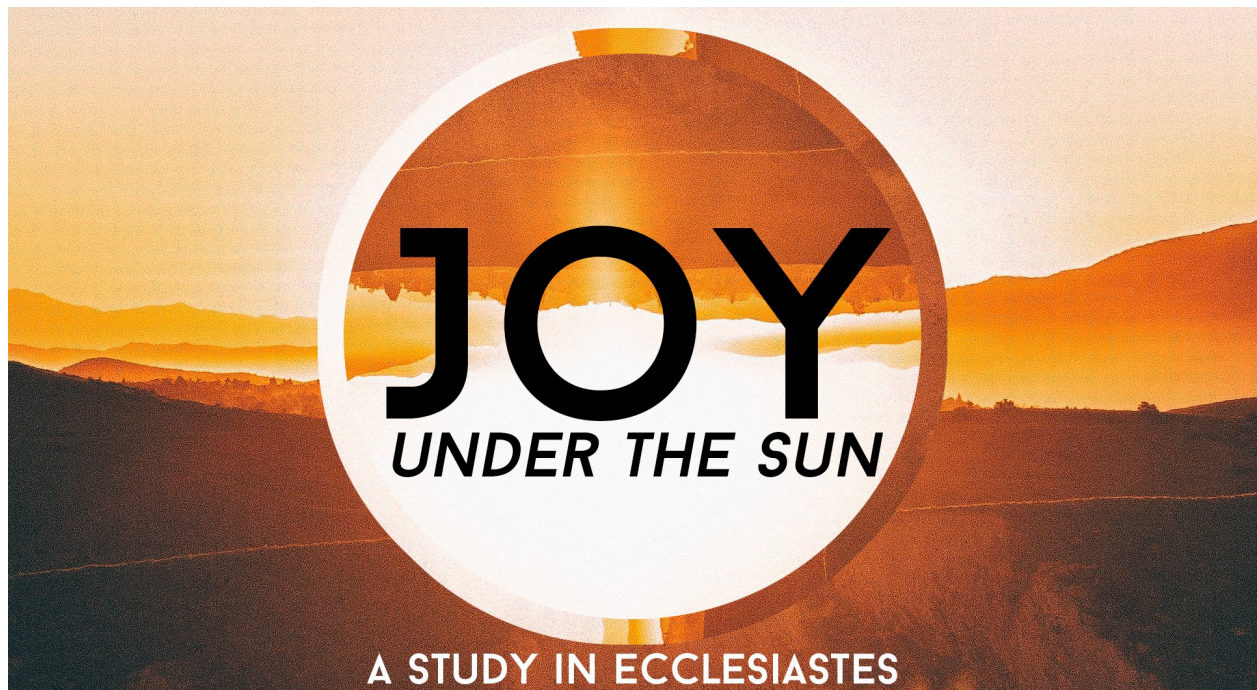


Rimrock Church

"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



Introduction

We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. Therefore, we are committed to a Christ centered view of the Old Testament, pointing us to Christ and his gospel.

Ecclesiastes is God's wisdom literature with a unified message that makes better sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ.

The preacher had left God out of the picture in his search for happiness. This book shows how utterly meaningless and unjust life is in a closed system where God does not play an affective part in the center of one's life. We will see that true joy is found only when we revere God as the center of our lives in all things and then, and only then, can we enjoy all of creation and his gifts.

Only through the fear of God (trembling trust) is this realized. In the midst of all the hard truths and awful troubles of this fallen world, those who come to the Lord with trembling trust are given by him the gift to enjoy the gifts of life with contentment and surprising joy. Worship is the result of enjoying these gifts.

Some authors* have summarized the book as:

1. It defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative. - another says true wisdom that Ecclesiastes offers us is to fear God and keep his commandments, in order to receive and use the gifts of God with joy and gratitude.
2. We are to fear God in order to turn a vain, empty life into a meaningful life in which we can enjoy God's gifts.

How, then should we live this temporary life under the sun?

The answer to that riddle is simple. We are to live our earthly lives by abandoning human delusions of self-importance and all pretense of pride, embracing divine wisdom and by worshiping the Creator.

If we will read Ecclesiastes through the lens of Jesus Christ,

- The true embodiment of wisdom
- Who has crushed the curse of death on the cross
- Who brought hope through his resurrection
- Who will bring justice at his return
- By whom we enjoy a blessed union of his life in us

we will gain a better understanding of this book.

God will bring rock-solid meaning to everything under the sun by means of his Son.



*Michael Easton & Sidney Greidanus, Ecclesiastes by Douglas Sean O'Donnell



Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

As a boy (Ben), who grew up in the tropics, I was not used to seeing my breath. One of the first winters I can remember was in Colorado when I was in the 6th grade. I was fascinated by my breath, and that I could see it! This is the word picture we are given in Ecclesiastes 1.

“Breath” (hă·bêl), breath says the teacher utterly breath! Everything is breath”

This Hebrew word (hă·bêl) highlights the temporary and transitory way you can briefly see your breath...then it's gone. Like smoke, vapor, or steam we see its presence briefly, but can't grasp it or hold on to it. This is why this word is translated as vanity.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom. A poem that helps us think about life and its meaning. Immediately this wisdom poetry confronts us with the reality that life is temporary and fleeting. The author uses imagery from the creation around us that reminds us daily of how temporary life is, just like the sun rising and setting, the wind blowing, and the water cycle. Each of these created things carry a glory and a temporary effect on things around them, but then the cycle happens over and over again. In this poetic way there truly is nothing new under the sun. Yes, we see the rise and fall of technology, inventions, and human systems, but these things too have a life cycle and their end is always the same as our end, here today and gone tomorrow just like a vapor or breath. The author is awaking us to the reality that only God the creator is truly permanent and unchanging (Creation points to this as well in vs.4). So, where do we find joy in this life? The author is helping us to look at death in the face so that we can truly learn to live with joy in this life given by God.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does understanding the Hebrew word for breath / vapor / vanity vs. meaninglessness change our understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes?
2. How does observing creation remind us of our brevity on earth and God's permanence?
3. How does thinking about our death help us understand wisdom in how we live now?
4. Read John 11:1-44 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-58. How does Jesus change the way we think about death?



Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Solomon shares his exploration of different approaches to the meaning of life. Because life is temporary does that mean it is meaningless? That is the question we are grappling with. How does death effect the way we live this life? For some, it means trying to satisfy themselves with the pleasures of this world.

Ecclesiastes explores hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure as the highest meaning in life) in thought and lifestyle. Solomon throws caution to the wind and tries to fill every impulse, desire, and craving that He has. "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure." 1st Kings 10 describes Solomon's wealth as an annual income of 666 talents of gold, incredible construction achievements, 12,000 horses, 1,400 chariots. It also says Solomon loved many foreign women and had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Solomon's conclusion of the pursuit of pleasure is, "yet when I surveyed all my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was vanity (breath), a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (2:11)

In other words, the pursuit of pleasure in its self is insufficient to provide meaning for life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you observed people around you or in our culture pursuing pleasure as a way to derive meaning in this life? Have you experienced this in your own life?
2. How does Solomon's example inform us about the pursuit of pleasure as ultimate and its consequences?
3. Read Mark 8:34-38; Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 10:31. How does Jesus change the way we think about the pursuit of pleasure?



Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

Solomon concludes that the pursuit of pleasure does not provide meaning in life so he explores other pursuits to see if they will provide meaning in life. In these verses he shares his experience with wisdom and work to see if they will give meaning to his life.

Solomon recognizes life. Solomon recognizes both wisdom and labor do provide some real benefit to life. He also comes to the conclusion that both of these things are insufficient within themselves to truly satisfy the human longing for meaning and purpose and are unable to rescue a person from inevitable death.

Solomon briefly flirts with Nihilism (the philosophy that life has no meaning or purpose) in verses 20-23. Yet, he rejects the despair of Nihilism and instead comes to a surprising conclusion. Life is a gift from God!

Solomon pursued life without God and found it was nothing but breath; temporary and meaningless. With God, Solomon finds that everything changes and gains meaning even though life is transitory. With God pleasure, wisdom, and work can all bring joy, meaning, and purpose in this life!

Discussion Questions:

1. How does materialism and atheism belief in the origin story of the universe effect the way our culture views life and death? What are some natural outcomes of atheism?
2. Solomon's belief in God changes everything for him as He ponders the meaning of life. What are some evidences of the existence of God?
3. How does it change how we live if we view life as a gift from God?
4. Read John 1:1-18; James 1:16-18; Romans 1:16-20. How does Jesus fulfill and reveal that life is a gift from God?



Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

If death reminds us of the temporary nature of life, then time constantly reminds us that what we do in the brevity of life matters. The rising and setting of the sun constantly reminds us of the passage of time.

Solomon points to the seasonal nature of creation to help us think about how we use our time. The poem in a sense, invites us to freedom from the tyranny of time and allows us to see activity within the framework of seasons. Solomon says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (3:1).

Solomon’s conclusion is that life is a gift from God. If life is a gift from God, then time is also a gift. Instead of seeing time as a tyrant without God, we can experience time with God as a season of experiencing, learning, growing, and realizing that God has “made everything beautiful in its time”.

Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about your relationship with time? Does the passage of time bring stress to your life? How do you schedule and respond to the passage of time?
2. How does seeing time as a gift from God change the way we think about it?
3. Read Luke 11:2-4; Luke 12:22-26; Romans 8:18-30. How has Jesus fulfilled and revealed a new way to think about time?