

STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES

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I. An Introductory Note:

Ecclesiastes is a fascinating book---part of the poetical literature of the Old Testament and in the division known as "Megilloth", the rolls. It is a book of human experience under the sovereignty to God. The author is Solomon, the great king and the author of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. We are told by tradition that he wrote the Song while young and thoughtful of the expectation of God, that he wrote the Proverbs, not as a single book, but as an overall collection of wise sayings gathered by the scribes and prophets of his court and that he wrote Ecclesiastes near the end of life when he saw his erroneous conduct of his passing years and wrote regretfully to show that when the Lord is not supreme in the issues of life, nothing is ultimately meaningful no matter how rich one may become or what social status one might enjoy. Knowing the Lord in obedience, worship, and love is the key to harmonious living in all identifiable parts of life. For this reason the book is enormously practical as a guideline regarding what is really important in life and that is why we are looking at it in this DVBS.

In a short synthesis then, the message of Ecclesiastes is the advice of a great teacher helping us to get the most out of life by putting our best efforts on the things of greatest value.

The talks are organized on this line:

1. An Unhappy Failure: The Career of Solomon
2. The Value of Knowledge
3. Being a Responsible Person in a Vacillating Society
4. Controlling Ambition and Goals
5. Enjoying Realities as You See Them
6. Letting Every Circumstance be an Opportunity for Growth.

These are the great values in life. For each of them I will offer Scriptures from the book and a series on analytical concepts. Our work is not sociological in that it attempts to meet all of society's need but it does try to show what the most meaningful values are as given in the text of Ecclesiastes. Questions are welcome at any time and individual matters may be discussed at break time. No, I will not be too tired to talk to anyone....I may look tired....it is a defense I have developed to a fine degree...but I do not need it here! At the close of these notes you will find an Ecclesiastical Dictionary and some suggestions of study as well as some identification that I believe are very difficult in interpretation.

II. The Messages

#1. *An Unhappy Failure, of sorts, Solomon*

A. The texts: 1 Kings 1-11; 1 Chronicles 29:18 ff; 2 Chronicles 1-9

B. A quick analysis of his monarchy:

1. the appointment 1 K 1:30
2. the accession: securing the throne 1 K 1:32ff
3. Establishing his rule 1 K 2:23, 34, 46
4. An oversight 1K 3:1 and see v. 3 as well as 1 K 7:8
5. The prayer of humility: 1 K 3:5-15---the first Divine vision
Note a promise and a test
6. His wisdom: 1 K 3:16; in summary 1 K 4:29ff
7. His administrative ability 1 K 4
8. The Temple work 1K 5-6; 7:2-51.
9. His Palace: 1 K 7:1
10. The time of Consecration 1K 8
the conditional elements 1K 8:31-51
11. The second Vision; 9:1-9
again a matter of promise and trust.
12. Overall accomplishments. 1 K 9:10-28
13. Pride and.....1 K 10
14. But 1 K 11:1-3; and a move 11:4-8
15. Divine Reproach 11:9-13
16. Trouble: 1 K 11:14-43

C. Summary:

A very great man but a costly failure. The lesson is that the Lord must be the necessary authority in our enterprises. Forgetting Him (and His Word) is tantamount to failure and disappointment. A careful, Spirit guided walk is necessary in all things. Failure is not mandatory but is certain if the Lord is defied!

#2. *Knowing the Right Things*

Please note the in the Ecclesiastes definition appendix the particular meanings given to "knowledge" "wisdom" "learning" and "folly". Well, you don't have to look them up but it might be beneficial! Solomon was unquestionably wise and he went to strengthen that wisdom by mastering many things. The seeking of knowledge was one of his major interests.

A. The main texts in Ecclesiastes and a brief note on the usage.

1. Ecc 1:12-18 Solomon professedly wanted to know all that he could about everything and he gave his heart (his whole interest to the completion of the project done in the light of wisdom....the ability to use what you know to achieve what you desire.
2. Ecc 2:34-26...real knowledge comes from God
3. Ecc 5:18-20...knowledge is gained by experience and is sealed in the reality of God in His Heart
4. Ecc 7:11-17..The reality of wisdom will show that it is not possible to govern all things well or perfect but it is a great aid in the understanding of truth and circumstance.
5. Ecc 8:16-17..the work of God is more than one can master so we learn to be whole in what we know.
6. Ecc 12:8-13...real and imperative knowledge is learned at the direction of a master teacher.

B, Summary Notes: **Knowledge**

1. as a thing in itself makes us aware of the futility in life in a world that is constant when we are not
2. disappoints in showing the life track
3. is superior to foolishness for it deals with reality
4. finds its full meaning in knowing the Lord...His gifts, His ways.
5. means virtually nothing in the sense of human values unless the Lord is the central force known. One can know a lot of things but if one does not know the Lord one is not prepared to understand the meaning and intention of life.

C. Conclusion: The greatest value in knowledge of the aspects of life is knowing The Lord. This knowledge will help us in adjusting all aspects of life and will give ultimate meaning to everything else.

#3...Being responsible in a shifting society...being a content, serving person

There is a great value in being a helpful, contented person who takes delight in serving others. My impression is that this is a life style that is learned both from the Scriptures and the examples of others. It is a theme in Ecclesiastes that is not immediately observed but....try to see it with us in this series.

A. The Scriptures: the main texts in their contexts:

1. Ecc 1:1-11 The writer surveys the stability of the universe. The most

unstable thing is man. Man (mankind) must learn to live in a world where the wind blows and the moisture cycle is complete even though man is not nearly so predictable or constant

2. Ecc 3:1-15....The poem of time. Man's time is limited but there is time for everything necessary if one will use the time that is at hand for the matter that is to be undertaken.
3. Ecc 4:4-12....Contentedness is important but it is often not sought (v.8) but if one will accept the principles under which we may operate, life is less restrictive and more comfortable.
4. Ecc 5:1-7....Be honest with God...that keeps us on the right plane with others
5. Ecc 6:1-11....Observe the ironies of life...since we cannot know it all or understand it all we survive on what we do know and how we can serve.
6. Ecc 9:7-12...The passage almost speaks for itself...take advantage of what the Lord has given you and throw yourself into it fully.
7. Ecc 11:1-10...Give yourself fully to whatever ministry you may have. The ultimate reward is from the Lord but you may be a great blessing to others without even knowing it....after all, if a tree falls wherever it will land that is where it will be!

B. Summary Notes: **Being responsible**

1. We recognize that the world is stable...we are the shaky parts.
2. God has given us time as a tool for achievement---to use it at our own opportunity and responsibility.
3. Watch for and enjoy the gifts of God and the things that make for happiness and health
4. Appreciate what the Lord provides and make the most of it.
5. Give yourself freely to the issues of living and remember that the Lord is the party to whom you are accountable.

C. Conclusion: Live contentedly (not in indolence or indulgence). We are told that godliness with contentment is great gain. Work hard and purposefully to serve God and others.

#4. Control ambition and goals

Much of the difficulty in our societies results from ambition and goals that lead some to problematic approaches to the whole scene. They may cheat, lie, steal, etc., to gain an end which they desire with little thought about others on the pathway. The goals that are purely personal and develop for ego or economic reasons give only temporary satisfaction and the reality of this in the life of Solomon is powerful

A. The Scriptures:

1. Ecc 2:1-11....Just take a quick note at all the stuff the King had and ask yourself in the light of the text if it brought him any real or lasting satisfaction.
2. Ecc 2:18-23...What is the great failure in this human achievement>
3. Ecc 5:9-17...The amassing of great wealth does not bring the sort of peace one would like. Why not? Well, the more you have the more others will want from you and it gets to be a very difficult setting.
4. Ecc 6:1-5...You may achieve the goals of ambition and suddenly find there is no continuance in them
5. Ecc 7:7-14..Evaluate every day in view of what God has given. Be careful about the good old days.
6. Ecc 8:12..inequities in life mar the satisfaction that one expects.
7. Ecc 9:13-18 ...The poor wise man won the battle for the people but the generals took the credit. One will find peace with contentment but not aggravation.

B. Summary Notes: **Controlling ambitions and goals**

1. Will make you realize that things do not bring peace in a full sense
2. Will help you to see that longevity does not produce the contentment desired because it may not be accompanied by the things that make life pleasant or meaningful
3. Keeps us from amassing things just for the sake of possession.
4. Shows us that the real values in ambitions are for pleasing the Lord and accepting His gifts, enablements, and opportunities.

C. Summary: Put your emphasis on spiritual things and on the benefit of others not chiefly on the things of this life. The eternal values are extremely important...the temporal ones are here today and gone tomorrow. The real values of a person's life are not found in the things they possess unless....God directs that way, opens the doors that way, and is honored as the Sovereign Lord.

5. *Enjoy the realities as you see them*

We are much taken with fantasy...the realities are a bit harsh at times. But the great values in life are associated with realities...whether life or death, etc. Value them highly and make the most of them.

A. The Scriptures:

1. Ecc 12:1-7...So you are getting old and showing the signs. Just remember your Creator...trust Him...things are better.
2. Ecc 9:7-10...The reality of relationship and occupation. Enjoy!
3. 5:"18-20...Survey the gifts of God. What can be better than these?

4. Ecc 7:7-10...Be patient in spirit and enjoy the day!
5. Ecc 8:12-15...Do what God wants...it will be well with those who trust Him....sinners do not come out on top!
6. Ecc 10:1-6...Be practical in the course of life..do not be jealous of others or making false standards for judging others.

B. Summary Notes: *Enjoying the Realities of Life....*

1. will enable you to use every part of life to honor the Lord.
2. will provided us with the time to appreciate and put to service our talents and skills.
3. allows one to see that the present assets are from God
4. enable us to follow simple and direct truths in the development of life and living practices.
5. calls us to enjoy the companionship God has given to us for for Himself and with others.

C. Conclusion: A little fantasy does not do great harm! But a return to reality is the needed action for the fulfillment of life and its goals.

#6. *Let Every Circumstance be an opportunity for growth and service.*

A lot of opportunities in life are wasted by worry, neglect, confusion, etc. We are not able to correct all of this but the “preacher” gives us some guidelines that are very meaningful.

A. The Scriptures:

1. 1:12-18...with whole-heartedness he approached every day and occasion to see what it held for him
2. Ecc 3:16-23...he saw that not everything could be completely corrected but he would trust the guidance of God.
3. Ecc 5:1-7.....the occasions to honor God must be taken seriously
4. Ecc 7:2-6..the choice of wisdom will allow learning in all of life’s situations....some are very tragic, some every day.
5. Ecc 8:1-5...Stay in right relationships with the authority whether human or divine. It helps keep one’s emphasis proper and develops edifying attitudes.
6. Ecc 11:1-6...Be generous and industrious...whatever the situation give it your best effort.

B. Summary Notes: *Every circumstance should....*

1. provide you with a note as to how the Lord is working...
2. challenge you to evaluate your response
3. provide you opportunity to study and see how it is beneficial

4. and it should enhance other aspects of your life....perhaps in the development of some skill
5. when you don't understand the circumstance be sure not to give up hope
6. From the Scriptures every circumstance should make one think again on the ways and will of God.

C. Conclusion: We may not be able to change things but there are many things that will change us...we must study these matters so that the changes are positive and beneficial, not harmful

CLOSING SUMMARY:

So I have not completed the writing of it and will have to rely on oral presentation! There is much more to Ecclesiastes that I have presented but the great theme of the book is simply this: Nothing is worthwhile if the Lord is not in it as director and conductor of our ethics and efforts. This can be given a lot more space but I am tired and probably the class is tired as well. Thanks for being with us for this study and may the Lord enrich your lives in the knowledge of Himself and His guidance in all areas of living.

SOME ECCLESIASTES VOCABULARY

These are notations with particular connotations in Ecclesiastes given not in an alphabetical order but in the order of occurrence in the book. The list is not as exhaustive as it might be....I hope it is helpful....if not, well, we have tried! My listing is from the KJV and some of these terms are translated otherwise in other versions.

- 1:1 "preacher"...from the Hebrew verb "to call" or "to gather"...The term seen in some works is "Koheleth" or "Cohleth" and it marks the person who gathers an assembly.
- 1:1 "vanity" indicates "nothingness" It is not our modern used of vanity...but the suggestion of "airiness" "vanity of vanities" is a superlative construction and indicates nothing is as much vain as this.
- 1:3 "labour" the common work or industry of life.
- 1:3 "under the sun"...the world in which we live
- 1:13 "under heaven", the expanse of the universe
- 1:13 "sore travail"...intense burdens, sorrows, societal difficulties
- 1:14 "vexation of spirit"...annoyance of the inward person....not a minor matter (cf 1:17)
- 1:13 "wisdom"...the ability to apply what one knows to meet the needs of one's situation.
- 1:17 "knowledge" information accrued by study, communication or observation
- 2:1 "mirth" spontaneous joy....not planned humor but that which rejoices one inwardly and in some cases outwardly (cf 8:15)
- 2:2 "laughter" making light of a situation
- 2:11 "no profit" nothing to be gained by this experience
- 2:12 "madness" thoughtless consideration....no given accountability
- 2:13 "folly" of the several words translated "folly" this one seems to indicate thick headedness (Young) or a compulsion to do what one wants to do without considering the results (10:1, 6).
- 2:14 "fool" a non-thinking person, not just a happy clown! (10:14)
- 3:1 "season" "time" a period of existence....not obligatory but simple occurrences
- 3:13 "the gift of God" indicates gracious acts of God's love and care....indeterminate quantities (2:24, 5:18, 8:15)
- 4:1 "oppression" affliction accorded in life by unspecified forces, etc
- 5:1 "the house of God"...presumably the temple but more designedly any place that is noted for God's presence as in Psalm 23
- 6:1 "evil"...distressing circumstances, not necessarily immoral but often so.
- 6:6 "one place"...the grave, no doubt.
- 7:29 "inventions"...the devices of men to remove themselves from the directives of the Lord.

- 9:2 "on event"....not the final judgment or destination but the common truth that
"as it is appointed once to die"
11:1 "bread"....your substance "water" the societal conditions about you.

A NOTE ON DIFFICULT PASSAGES

A difficult passage is one for which interpretation is hard and it may be made more complex by the grammar or the vocabulary. To me, one of the hardest passages in Ecclesiastes is that of 7:23-29. 5:8 is a difficult verse for my understanding but most of the passages in Ecclesiastes are seen rather easily if kept in the mind of the context: A great man telling us what he has learned and what we should learn from him

SOME FASCINATING PICTURES

The Song of Time...3

The picture of Old Age 12

The advice for living 12

The adventures of the poor wise man 9;13ff

The analogy of 10:1

And you will find many other interesting segments but remember: the point of the book is that nothing is meaningful unless God is in it and it is lived under His guidance and care.