**Ecclesiastes 1**

We will be in the book of Ecclesiastes this morning. Ecclesiastes, in Greek means “preacher” (a form of *ekklesia)*. The Hebrew form of the word, means “one who speaks at an assembly.” The book of Ecclesiastes is a strange book. It’s a very hard book to interpret.

There is just something off about the book of Ecclesiastes. For years I very much struggled with to understand it. It’s almost like there is something right, it seems to make sense, it seems to make sense, but then no, there is something off."

The very first verse opens like this, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”

Solomon is the author (1:1). He was a son of David. He was a king of Jerusalem after David. The book is clearly taken from experiences in his own life. He discusses wisdom (1:16), wealth (2:7-8), fame (2:9), and accomplishments (2:4-6) Solomon was a king during Israel’s most prosperous time. Some Israelites even looked to the time of Solomon as the time when all of God’s earthly promises were being fulfilled to Israel. In fact, when things are restored they are hoping it will be as where things then. My point in mentioning this, is not to say it is so, but rather just to point out that Solomon was very prosperous.

Solomon was also said to be the wisest person in the world. He wrote two other books. The Song of Solomon, and Proverbs. All three books are considered wisdom literature. Though the Song of Solomon is more of a love story. Many read the Song of Solomon, at least in part, as being metaphorically a story of love between God and his people. Christ and the church.

And the book of Proverbs is just that, a book filled with proverbs. Catchy, succinct, easy to remember phrases filled with wisdom that give us insight into how life works best. Proverbs examines life from all its little intricacies. How all the little details work out.

It says things like Proverbs 6:10, “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands and so shall poverty come upon a man” I mean it makes sense right. If you love sleep, and can’t seem to get yourself out of bed. If your lazy, and all you want to do is lay around, things are not going to go well. Poverty is probably in your future. I mean, it’s not a guarantee. But it’s most likely.

Or Proverbs 22:6, ’train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it” Again. If you want your child to grow up in a good way. Loving God, and living like someone that loves God, you raise them, and pray for them, and do your best to instill that in them. It wouldn’t make sense not to. I mean you can’t honestly say, you want your kids to be followers of Jesus and do nothing about trying to lead their hearts to him and teaching them and showing them what a follower of Jesus looks like.

It’s still not a guarantee. Though they are kids, they are still their own person. And we are not the Holy Spirit, we are not God. Only God can change their hearts and save them.

But the book of Proverbs is telling you, the wisest thing to do if you want your children to follow the Lord, is to plant seeds. Provide kindling. You need to invest in them. You can’t just say, I sure I hope my kids become Christians and then not do anything about it. That’s just not wise.

The book of Proverbs is telling you, over and over again, the way that life works best. God has a natural order and way of doing things. Not always. I mean he is God. He can do things any way he wants to.

But he generally has a natural order. And this is good. This is why there are so many things we can count on. The sun rises everyday in the east and sets in the west. This makes good for doing science and for doing math. Two plus two is always four. There are basic laws of physics. There is a natural order of things, there are things we can count on. And this is what wisdom is based on. You want to eat. Then work. You want your children to grow up, loving, and honoring and serving the Lord. Then teach them what that means. And so that’s what Proverbs deal with, the little intricacies that make life what it is.

The book of Ecclesiastes, however, examines life from a different perspective. It takes a look at it from 10,000 ft. level. What does it all mean? What’s the meaning of life? Is there any purpose? Why am I here, and does it even matter? That’s what the book of Ecclesiastes is seeking to tackle. The big picture. What’s the big picture?

I think you will be surprised in how it goes about doing this, though. Oh, it’s so sad. And it so much hit home last Sunday. I had just spent the morning worshipping God with all of you here. Being encouraged. Listening to Larry preach a fine sermon. I got to teach a Sunday school class. Then I got to eat some wonderful food during our weekly fellowship time …. and then to top it all off, I got to go to the nursing home here in town with Danica and Andy, and Ryan and Abi and all the kids, and spend the afternoon ministering and being ministered to. It was a wonderful day.

And then I come home. I turned on the news and heard about this small church, in a small town in Texas, probably a town the size of Foster, or Fairchild. Where almost 10% of it’ population was killed. And the only motive anyone has been able to come up with is the man who did it, did not believe in God, and thought that people who do, did not deserve to be alive, and he was going to do something about it.

Read c**hapter 1**

Really. Really Solomon. That’s what you have for me. In the midst of a world filled with tragedy, that’s what you have for me.

Go spend a week in the children’s intensive care unit once, like Becky did. Children dying of cancer. And this is what you got for us.

All is just vanity. Vanity, just means for show. All is just for looks. And what does striving after the wind even mean? Trying to catch wind. Trying to gather wind up. This is the meaning of life. Something seems off friends.

These are the words of a preacher. This is who we go to, to find help. And the thing is, it doesn’t get any better. The rest of the book doesn’t get any better. It just goes on and on. More bleak, and more bleak. Seriously. If you are looking for a pick me up. Don’t go to the book of Ecclesiastes, friends. In this book, Solomon, seems just as confused as everyone else.

This is the wisest man in the world. And he basically just said, that seeking after wisdom makes as about as much sense as trying to harvest wind.

Last Sunday night, after the shooting, a friend put on Facebook, by the way his name is Joseph Randall Spurgeon. He is the great nephew of Charles Spurgeon. That and $1.59 will get you a cup of coffee at Kwik Trip. But anyway, he posted this on Facebook and then was proceeded to be attacked by evangelistic atheist all night long. He wrote:

"This is a tragedy for Christians. For atheists, Devin was just consistent with his atheism. No God, No foundation for morality, No Ultimate meaning to life, and No Justice. I'm just thankful that most atheists aren't consistent with their own worldview."

And this is true. If there is no God. There is no foundation for morality. There is no ultimate meaning to life and no one we will have to give account to for their actions. Basically, do whatever you want is the whole of the law.

What is wrong with murder if you don’t believe in God. I mean what is your standard. Because you say it wrong. But what if someone else says it is not wrong.

What happens when humans become their own arbitrators. We have seen this play out in history time and time again. What is wrong with abortion if there is no God that says murder is wrong. Obviously, nothing, because humans have justified it quite fine.

What is wrong with what Stalin or Hitler did for the supposed good of the greater society if there is no God?

A couple weeks ago, Chuck and I were watching a debate between a Christian and an atheist. The atheist spoke first. One of his main points was that atheism is a better worldview, because look at all the horrible things throughout history that Christians have done.

And the Christians looked at him and said, “Please explain to me from your worldview, why any of those things you just mentioned are even wrong? You see, friends. Though, Christians have done a lot of horrible things throughout history. Big and small.

It’s why I pray this prayer every morning before I get out of bed. Dear Lord, So far I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I'm really glad about that.

But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help.

Seriously though, look at Martin Luther, credited as starting the reformation. We have Bibles in our hands, in our own language and can gather together to worship today, and so many other things because of what God did through him. Yet, he was a man, like you and I, also filled with much sin.

Or the fact that it was Christians who founded this country, and by and large, also it was professing Christians who brought and bought and sold slaves over here. And it is horrible. The injustice. And yet it is also the Christians worldview that ultimately brought an end and is still bringing an end to slavery around the world.

The thing is, it is the Christian worldview that says it is wrong. And sometimes we as Christians don’t live according to what we believe. Sometimes we have blind spots. But it is the Christian worldview that defines sin. Without the Christian worldview all we would have is opinion.

Christians might do horrible things, but it is the Christian worldview that says those things are horrible. Any time Christians do horrible things it is not because they are living according to what they are supposed to believe. It is because they are not.

But atheist cannot say that. What is an atheist objective moral standard for right and wrong? And an atheist pointing out all the horrible things Christians have done, doesn’t even make sense.

It’s the Christians worldview they are borrowing from to say there is a right and wrong. Not the atheistic worldview. It is the Christian worldview that says don’t always follow your heart. Your heart can deceive you. Yes, you might want to cheat on your spouse. You might want to steal and lie to get ahead. But don’t do it. Check your wants and desires with God’s word and see if they line up. And then go with God’s word every time. God’s word trumps our opinion.

Friends, if there is no God. No divine creator giving us reason and purpose. Then we are just random accidents, floating stardust.

Why does anything even matter? Without God, everything is worthless vanity. A harvesting of the wind. Without God, it means we just came from nowhere and are going nowhere. Without God, we might as well, eat drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

The Apostle Paul says this very thing in 1 Corinthians 15:32. There are a lot of people like that unfortunately.

Lots of people do not think there is much meaning to life. Plenty of people, if you said to them, “Is there a real, ultimate meaning to life?” would give you a blank stare. And probably say something like. “No, I don’t think so. You do what you can, you get along, if you can make money fine, do whatever makes you happy” There are a lot of people for whom that is there ultimate goal. Just do whatever to try and make yourself happy.

Consider Ecclesiastes 2 vs. 1, “I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. **2** I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” **3** I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. **4** I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. **5** I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. **6** I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. **7** I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. **8** I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So, I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me. **10** And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

**11** Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

vs. 17, “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.”

or vs. 22-23, “What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? **23** For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.”

And so, the Book of Ecclesiastes forces us to look at life as honestly as possible from the point of view of a person who thinks there is no God, no life after death, no judgment, no heaven, no hell, nothing, just this life. It forces us to ask the question, what meaning does life have without God.

What meaning is there to life if there is no final judgment? There is an old catechism. An old teaching tool. The Westminster. Filled with questions and answers. That you would do well to get to know. The first question goes like this.

What is the chief end of man? In other words. What is our main purpose? And the answer is, to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And this is what the book of Ecclesiastes is saying. Yet, we don’t know that until the very end.

In the very last chapter, at the very end of the book, Chapter 12 vs. 13-14 “Here is the conclusion to the whole matter after all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, this is the whole duty of man because God will bring everything that has been done into judgment.”

The preacher calls for us very eloquently to live our lives with God’s purposes in mind. Ecclesiastes is saying, in effect, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But is doing so in a kind of a reverse way by chapter after chapter examining what little there is to believe in if a person does not believe in God.

The person writing it, Solomon is being very sly. Writing from personal experience. He’s coming from behind and slapping us, upside the head.

Sometimes I think the best way to understand the book of Ecclesiastes is to read it backwards. From back to front. I am not saying to do that, but if do, and start with the conclusion of the whole matter, it all makes sense.

Solomon is saying over and over again throughout the book; life doesn’t make sense, life doesn’t make sense. It’s just all for show. Vanity. Meaningless. Worthless. Until I considered God.

Like in Psalm 73 where it says, “Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning…. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.” (vs. 12-14, 16-17).

Friends, it might look like people who don’t believe in God are doing really great. Are storing up all kinds of money. Never have any trouble. Having all kinds of fun. But they are not. It’s shallow. Fleeting. It’s bleak. People who don’t know God, no matter what their stubborn hearts will want to tell you, have no hope. The book of Ecclesiastes will attest to this. They are searching for fulfillment and meaning everywhere except from God and just can’t find it.

Life for people who don’t know God, is just vanity. All for show. Meaningless and worthless. And I am not being puffed up or prideful in telling you this. I am just telling you what the word of God says.

In a very tricky way, Ecclesiastes is calling us to consider the end, the reason for all things, then live your life with that in view. With the purpose God created us for. Like Jonathan Edwards always used to say. Live your life looking through the lenses of eternity. Friends it’s truth. Without God, nothing makes sense. But with God everything makes sense.

We might not know all of life answers. We might not know exactly why that man went and shot up that church. Or why kids are born with awful diseases.

But we have more than that. One of the biggest struggles people have is, if there is a God who is all powerful and all good then why is there so much pain and suffering in the world. And we don’t know the exact answer of why always. But we have something more.

The whole storyline of the Bible is God dealing with that problem, the problem of evil. God knows there is a problem. And he is doing something about it.

The big picture is that without God there is no meaning to life. You start out as a pile of goo, you die as a pile of goo and everything in between, all the tragedies and all the joys are just worthless meaningless accidents.

But since there is a God, there is real meaning and we are actually created for a reason and so therefore our goal is to enjoy Him and all that he has made, trusting in him. You see, if you don’t know God, all you have is this life.

Friends, that’s a horrible way to look at the world. That the world the way it is now, is the best things will ever be. But the preacher man. The man who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. Got to the end of it all. Examined the whole matter. And said, no, there is something more.

There is a God, and since there is a God who we have to give an account to for our life. Everything we do matters. And since everything we do matters, the conclusion of it all, is to “fear Him and keep his commandments” That’s why Solomon could write in Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

And he will direct your paths. It will not always be easy. But know that, through all of life’s trials and all of life’s hardships, he will be with you. And it does have meaning.

Like the heart gripping song by Shane and Shane, “Though you Slay me” “Though You slay me Yet I will praise You Though You take from me I will bless Your Name Though You ruin me Still I will worship Sing a song to the one who’s all I need”. This song has not only ministered to me deeply over the years but I dare say, I have seen it do the same to so many others.

I attended a funeral of a young 17 yr. old man who had died on a short-term mission’s trip. No prior health problems. No nothing. Just suddenly fell over and died after leading devotions that morning. They flew his body back to the States.

They found his journal. In his journal the young man had the songs he wanted sung at his funeral and the text he wanted preached. The text was, “To live is Christ, to die is gain” from Philippians 1. The song was “Though you slay Me”.

Now this young man had eternity on his mind. The worship leader of the church was his father. I would dare say it was hard to sing those words that day. But I can also say on the authority of God’s word that, that young man’s life and death was not meaningless.

Hear the words from the interlude in the middle of the song:

” Not only is all your affliction momentary, not only is all your affliction light in comparison to eternity and the glory there. But all of it is totally meaningful. Every millisecond of your pain, from the fallen nature or fallen man, every millisecond of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that. I don’t care if it was cancer or criticism.

I don’t care if it was slander or sickness. It wasn’t meaningless. It’s doing something. It’s not meaningless. Of course, you can’t see what it’s doing. Don’t look to what is seen. When your mom dies, when your kid dies, when you’ve got cancer at 40, when a car careens into the sidewalk and takes her out, don’t say, “That’s meaningless.” It’s not. It’s working for you an eternal weight of glory. Therefore, therefore, do not lose heart. But take these truths and day by day focus on them. Preach them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and preach his word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are new and cared for.”

Friends, life is not meaningless. There is a God. He has a purpose for every single part of your life. Down to the little intricate details. He is in control of all things. And he cares for you.

And we can know this, without a shadow of a doubt we can know this. Why? Because the God of the universe. The maker of heaven and earth. The one we are told in the first chapter of the gospel of John, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God” …. “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

The one we are told in Philippians 2, emptied himself and became a man.

Jesus Christ. Whom the whole OT is pointing to. Jesus Christ, the very God of Gods. The same God whom it says of at the end of Ecclesiastes, that the sum of everything we should learn from life, is Fear God and keep his commandments.

That God, left heaven, became a man, lived a perfect, died on a cross as our substitute, taking the punishment, we deserved for our sins, so that we indeed could be rescued.

That’s what God did for you. There’s nothing greater you can do than that. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “He who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God”.

That is the greatest thing you could ever come to set your focus on. That the God who rightly and justly could throw every one of us into hell for all of eternity is also the same God who died on the cross for our sins so we don’t have to be.

Salvation. Eternal salvation comes through him. And without that. Nothing else matters.

The man who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes had all the money in the world. The largest kingdom in the world. Everything in life that people tend to put so much hope in or wish they had, he had, money, wealth, riches, power, fame, and yet he said it was all worthless and vain.

When he came to the end of his life he said what ultimately matters is to fear God and keep his commandments.

Why do we fear God? I will tell you why. On this side of the cross. On this side of the Bible. We have crossed the Testamental divide. We are in the New Covenant that the Old Testament is point to. We know that Jesus died for our sins. We know this is the New Covenant sealed in his blood.

We know that. And since we know that, we know there is no other way of salvation except Jesus Christ. So, friends, we fear not believing that. We fear not giving that the worth in our life that deserves. We fear not trusting him. We fear making other things in life more important than that. We fear not being by his side. We fear walking away from him.

Life is short. 60, 70, 80, 90 years and then what. Eternity. Friends, live your life with eternity in view. Live your life for Jesus. Everything else is just waste. Everything else is worthless.

Don’t waste your life. Live your life for Jesus. Make it count. That’s my challenge to you today.

Jesus Christ demands for us are not burdensome. He died for our sins so that we could live for him. Galatians 5:1 says, “For freedom Christ has set us free”

It’s for freedom. Jesus Christ summed up all of God’s law like this. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (10:27) That’s his demand on you. Be forgiven. Than love. Love others, because he first loved you. (1 John 4:19). That’s what this world needs. And Jesus knows that’s what this world needs.

That’s why he said. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Is it going to be easy? No. We are never promised it’s going to be easy. But we are promised it will be worth it. And we are promised that he will be with us to the very end.

Make this the first day of the rest of your lives.

In fact, I would dare say, make it your hope that he would cause you to live for his purpose. As I close with this benediction out of Jude, the second to the last book in our Bibles.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, **25** to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time[h] and now and forever. Amen.

(Jude 24-25)