

“It’s All Gone to Hevel” // Ecclesiastes 1, 12 // *Full of Nothing* 1

Welcome of College Students

At some of our campuses you are probably looking around feeling like everything got a lot more cramped between last week and this one—and you wonder, “Did the campus pastors do such a good job preaching last weekend that they grew our attendance by 30% in one week?” Maybe. But another explanation is that this is the 1st weekend that our college students are back! **So, Summit Church at all campuses,** would you put your hands together and welcome back our students? Important part of our church and we miss you.

Well, I feel like this is the kind of thing that shouldn’t have to be said, but in **light of some of what has gone on** recently I feel like I need to say it—and you can consider this the **official position** of our church—we **stand without reservation** against any and all expressions of white supremacy.

Anyone who supports that position has no understanding of the gospel, and **the name of Jesus** should certainly never be attached to that kind of demonic wickedness.

Our **message is that we are all equally made in the image of God;** with **one problem, sin,** and one hope, Jesus.

Works Consulted:

“Universal Longing,” James MacDonald

“Search for Achievement,” Tim Keller

“A Creed,” Tommy Nelson

“A Critique of ‘Life Under the Sun,’” Tommy Nelson

- **I’ve heard it said that heaven would be a white supremacists’ hell,** because there you’ll find people of every tribe, tongue and nation worshipping around the throne of a Jew.
- **Racism is a blasphemous offense** against God, and leads to the worst kinds of wickedness, and we unqualifiedly stand against it.
- **To our brothers and sisters of color,** we love you, we stand with you; we are one with you in Christ Jesus.

*“God, situations like this remind us of our brokenness, and how badly we need the grace and healing of Jesus. We pray that **you might create in this church a reflection of the Kingdom you have promised to bring in. Use us, Lord, as instruments of peace. Let us be people filled with grace, and peace, and a zeal for righteousness and justice.**”*

Vote on Financing for Property

I’ve got a message for you this weekend, I promise, but I wanted to remind everyone, before we get to that, that next weekend, we’ll be voting on a recommendation the elders have brought to approve the financing for the building our new broadcast campus.

- **I’m excited to be taking this step,** because it is going to expand our ability to reach more people with the gospel, which, by God’s grace, has always been the focus of this church.
- **In just the last couple weeks, in Apex, we’ve seen what an expanded facility can do.** That campus had been meeting at Cary High for several years, and in the last 1.5 years had plateaued at about 1,100 people a week. In the new facility, the last two weeks have *doubled* that. Literally doubled.
 - **What changed?** Did the people in Apex suddenly get more spiritual? **Remove the sin** from their lives? (Maybe.) No—we made space for people. That’s what this financing measure will allow us to do.

- **Now, I know this is a big step for us as a church, but our elders have consulted several of the top financial experts** in this field to ensure that this is a **wise investment—IOW**, that it doesn't **straddle us with debt** in way that restricts our ministry ability or keeps us from giving to missions or saving money to plant new campuses. They have counseled us that this a wise and important step in our growth, and one that will enable us to do more of all of those things. I am so thankful for their work in this.
- **This recommendation really comes down to two questions:**
 - **Do we have the seating capacity to keep reaching people?** No, some of our campuses don't. We have to do something about that. It is our mission. To not do it would be unfaithful to Jesus, who told us to seek and save the lost.
 - **Do we have the financial capacity to do this?** Yes, because of God's faithfulness through your generosity, we do.
- You say, "I thought we were about sending people!" We are, but to send them we have to reach them first, and this enables us to do that."
- **So, as your pastor I'm asking you to vote to affirm this measure** so we can get about the task of reaching our community as God has called us.

Introduction

Open your Bibles to... ECCLESIASTES. **I've been waiting for 15 years to say that...** I've been pastor here for 15 years and I've never preached through Ecclesiastes. Not even a single message from Ecclesiastes. **Why? you ask. Here's why.**

It has verses in it like these: "For the fate of the children of Adam and animals is the same. ²⁰All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. ²¹Can anyone really prove that the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward into dust?"

- IOW, animals and humans may live different lives, but they are exactly alike in death.
- **Say you have, lying side by side, the dead body of Albert Einstein and a cat—in life, one could play Mozart** and figure out quantum physics, the other just played with a yarn ball and fantasized about ripping innocent children's faces off, but they are both the same now—decomposing corpses)

How about this one? "Everything ends the same for everyone: The same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad..." (Ecc 9:2) That's not exactly the message we usually preach in church, is it?

Plus, there's some really strange advice, like: "Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you wear yourself out?" -Ecclesiastes 7:16

Or just odd, random advice:

- "Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!" -Ecclesiastes 9:8 **Granted, I know some single guys** who need to hear that, but it's important enough to include in the Bible?
- "If two lie together, they keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?" -Ecclesiastes 4:11 ESV Commentators are clear, this is not about sex, it is a metaphorical picture about the value of friendship. **If it's cold outside, and you're traveling with a friend** instead of alone, you have someone to spoon with. I've prayed that God would never let me have to apply this verse.

And then verses you just don't know what to do with: "Wine makes life happy, and money is the answer for everything." -Ecclesiastes 10:19

And then some really politically incorrect verses like this one: "I found one upright man among a thousand... (add when I call for it) ...but not one upright woman among them all." -Ecclesiastes 7:28 NIV

(Occasionally when I'm at a place I'll get asked to do a book signing, and they always want me to include a verse when I sign... this is 1 of the references I write just to mess them up later).

Or **verses where you are not quite sure** what point is being made: "If a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie." -Ecclesiastes 11:3

- Thank you, Captain Obvious! You could have at least told us whether it makes a sound or not.

But I ask, "What am I supposed to do with all this?" *Do y'all see how hard my job is?*

You're going to find that Ecclesiastes is one of the most confusing-yet-clarifying books in all the Bible.

- This book is really going to **rattle** some of you, because it is going to shatter this neat-and-tidy view of the world you have; others of you are going to feel **like this book really helps** things make so much more sense. (And I include in that some of you who have heard hundreds of sermons in church, but this book is going to make some of you say, "At last, someone is telling the truth! I get it!")

I know that's a tall order, and we only have 2 weeks, so let's get started.

[Ecclesiastes 1:1-3](#)

Ecclesiastes opens like this: **1** The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem. **2** "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Absolute

futility. Everything is futile." **3** What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?

Our first question is: "Who wrote this book?" And you read this verse and say, "Well, duh, Solomon."

- Solomon was **king** over Israel and the **son of David**.
- Furthermore, this "Teacher" will talk about **how he got everything he wanted** in life—wisdom, women, riches, and power, but apart from God they still left him empty.¹ That's Solomon's life in a nutshell.

So obviously, Solomon. However, there are clearly TWO voices in this book. One is the voice of this "Teacher" who talks about the sense of futility he had with his accomplishments. The other is the voice of an Editor, who makes periodic comments on what the Teacher says in the book—sometimes affirming what he says, sometimes correcting.

Now, is it possible that Solomon is BOTH voices—as in Solomon gives to us his perspective as a man who forsook God in his final years chasing pleasure and power, **but then** he corrects himself because he came back to God in the final, final days of his life? (Like this was a deathbed type of book?) Maybe. I think it is the most natural reading of the book.

However—1 Kings, which contains the full story of Solomon's life, never says he repented in his last days, and that seems like something the writer would have included had it happened.

¹ Furthermore, vs. 12 says the writer was King over all Israel from Jerusalem. Only Solomon would qualify for that, because after that Israel divided and so only Solomon ruled over all Israel from Jerusalem.

So, the other option is that a later Editor took some of Solomon's final musings, put them down in a book, and then offers his divinely inspired interpretation of them.

So, in that scenario you have two different people writing this book—Solomon, who in his later life lived like a fool, and then this Editor who compiles his writings and correct him.

So, which is it? *Ready for this... I don't know. The good news is that neither approach changes how you interpret Ecclesiastes; the essential thing to remember is that there are **TWO voices** in Ecclesiastes, because only then will you be able to interpret this book correctly and make sense of some of the madness.*

The second thing to notice is a key word Solomon introduces in the 2nd verse: “futility.” *Absolute futility.* It's a word that will be repeated 38 times throughout the book.

- It's “futility” in the translation I am using, but it is a really tough word to translate.
- The Hebrew is “hevel,” and it literally means vapor, or smoke.
- **Sometimes it gets translated “meaningless” or “emptiness” or KJV “vanity”** and scholars say it means a little bit of all of those, but not fully captured by any of them.
- Probably the **best way to grasp the meaning** is to consider the word picture itself. Hevel: smoke or vapor. Like a CLOUD.
- You know how when you were a kid **the clouds looked like a gigantic, comfy pillow** you could bounce around on or curl up in? I remember as a kid my first flight how disappointed I was when we passed through the clouds and you could really see that there's nothing even the fullest-looking clouds. If you are falling, you would pass through the thickest clouds like they aren't even there.

- **How many skydived?** One of 3 things in my life that has fully lived up to expectations. Best part is when you pass through a cloud.

- They look so solid and substantive from the outside, but they aren't. They are full of nothing. HEVEL.
- **That's what life is like, Solomon says.** It looks one way from the outside, but when you press into it, you find it out it is full of nothing; it is empty.

One scholar says the best translation is “absurd.” Life has a quality to it that doesn't make sense. Even when you are walking with God, there are parts that don't make sense. They seem **absurd**.

This book comes right after the book of Proverbs in your Bible, which is intentional—they are both part of the ‘Wisdom Literature’ of the Bible.

Proverbs often reads like a book of guarantees: *“If you will do this, then this will happen...”* For example,

- **Prov 3:10** “Honor the Lord with your firstfruits, work hard and be honest and God will bless you with wealth, honor, and riches.”
- Or **Prov 6:6** which says “Work hard like the ant and save money like the beaver and you'll have lifelong riches that you'll be able to leave to your children.”²
- Or **Prov 22:6**, “Raise up a child in the way he should go, and when he's old he will not depart from it.”

And those are **great pieces of wisdom**, and following that wisdom often will often lead you to success, honor, good kids, and even riches. Much more so than if you don't. **But here's the thing: that counsel is not foolproof; it is not designed to be.**

- (The book is called “Proverbs,” not “promises,” and Proverbs is more about general wisdom and principles. Again, it's wise to live

² Prov 6:6; 19:4–5, 13:22

by them, and you'll be much better off than if you don't—**but many of us have had the experience of doing what Proverbs said** and having the opposite thing to what Proverbs said would happen, happen.

- You worked hard like the ant and saved and tithed and then the stock market crashed and you lost your retirement.
- You led your business with integrity, putting others first... and you went out of business.
- You pursued marriage God's way and your spouse cheated on you and left you.
- You did your dead-level best to raise up your child in the way they should go but when they were old they *did* depart from it.

Haven't you had the experience of doing something the right way, the Proverbs way, and everything fell apart?

- **Illus.** I had a lot of **bad jobs in college**. The worst one I ever had was a job that Bruce Ashford, one of our elders, convinced me to take with him pimping credit cards outside of one of the department stores in Crabtree Valley mall. People would walk by and we'd try to get them to sign up for a credit card by giving them a free gift. That's right... I was *that guy*. And I was pretty good at it... When I refused to trick them into signing for insurance. The wicked will be brought to shame, the one who honors God will prosper (Prov 28:25). I quit getting bonuses and eventually I was told not to come back in anymore. I was supposed to be like Daniel—made more prosperous by my virtuous decision!
- **That's a really small example but life is full of those.** Life is not fair.
- **In chapter 9³ Solomon tells the story of a poor man** who through his wisdom figured out a plot against the city, acted heroically and saved the city, but the rich people figured out a way to steal the

credit for themselves—by manipulating the court system. They were honored, but his role in it was ignored.

- **Haven't many of you have had that same experience?**
 - Someone else at work got the credit for a job because they knew how to play office politics better than you did.
 - You got passed over for promotion or even got robbed of justice because you were the wrong color or the wrong gender or wouldn't sleep with the boss.
- **Sometimes life feels absurd! It is hevel!** This is what the writer is saying. He is saying wisdom is good, but there is a glitch in the system.
- He's not saying that life is meaningless, it is just problematic; unsolid, like a cloud. **Sometimes absurd. Hevel.**

Which leads me to the final phrase to notice in this opening verse: "under the sun". He will repeat this phrase **29x** throughout the book. The teacher indicates that **his perspective only takes into view** how things look "under the sun."

What is over the sun? Heaven.

- **Solomon deliberately leaves out heaven's perspective**, or how the reality of God—his plan and his promises—change everything.
- **And that's what the "Editor"—the other voice—brings in—** throughout the book he reminds you that there's more to life than what you see "under the sun."
- **Ecclesiastes describes for you what life looks like under the sun** after the fall of man.
 - Scholars point out that Solomon's repeated uses of the word "toil" and "futility" harken back to Genesis 3, where God decreed that because of sin man was **cursed to live** on earth in **futility and toil**.
 - Solomon is unpacking for us what that feels like.

Again, this book is going to help some of you so, so much. It's going to show you how to trust in God when it's all gone to Hevel.

For some of you, however, this book is really going to rattle you, because you have this neat and tidy view of God that if you do (a—good thing) God will always do (b—blessing thing) and so as long as you are a good person and do what's right God will make everything smooth sailing in the end. That **perspective is going to get shattered** in this book.

- And **while uncomfortable**, this is going to be really good thing for you, because at some point the *Hevel of life is going to smash you* in the face;
- **As the Rabbis** would say, *"The Hevel is really going to hit the fan,"* and if you're not ready for it, you'll be mad at God, and be like, **"But God, I did this, and I thought you were supposed to... and why didn't you... God, do you even exist? I hate you."**

So, the first thing I want to do is show you 3 primary ways Solomon experienced life as "hevel":

I. The absurdity of pursuing pleasure and power

Ecc 2: 1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." TREAT YO'SELF. So...³ I explored with my mind the pull of wine on my body—my mind still guiding me with wisdom— (Solomon is like the Sophomore who wakes up from a hangover with a missing tooth and a face tattoo and has no idea how he got there, but then finds a detailed notebook he kept while in his drunken state). That is the book of Ecclesiastes.

10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure... Remember **all that Solomon had?**

Everything in his house was made of gold; he was multi-talented, well-read; his kingdom was at peace and his power was unchallenged; he ate great food and had 1000 different sexual options every night. **In addition to all this** he wrote NYT bestselling books on every subject, was one of the most popular song-writers of his day, built the most impressive Temple the world had ever seen and led Israel in a national revival—pretty good list of life accomplishments. **11** Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was useless and like striving after wind, and there was *nothing* to be gained under the sun.

Three ways Solomon said the pursuit of worldly pleasure and security are absurd. First of all, he says, they are...

A. Unfulfilling

- **He said**, "I thought I would feel complete if I had an excess of pleasure and power." But I didn't.
- **Here's the thing: Multiple times throughout the book** Solomon will say: *"Money is good. Love and sex are good. Health is good. They are gifts of God to enjoy!"⁴ But when they become the primary place you seek happiness, you'll find them empty."*
- **I read a stat that showed, for example**, that people who have their basic needs met are indeed happier than those who live below the poverty line. The study showed,⁵ however, that after your basic needs are met and you have a small amount of savings—I think the number they used was a combined household income of \$75K/yr—there is literally no correlation between increased net worth and happiness.
 - And **we also know** that suicide rates and depression are highest among the rich, proving that increases in money don't lead to increased happiness.

⁴ 2:24; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:9-10

⁵ <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2019628,00.html>

- **That's what Solomon is saying.** It is good to have your needs met (money and family are good). But if they are your primary source of life, they will leave you empty.

Here's a truth most people don't understand that the Editor of Ecclesiastes explains: There is money and family and then there is the ability to enjoy them and those are *two different things*: **6:1** Here is a tragedy I have observed under the sun, and it weighs heavily on humanity: ² God gives a person riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires for himself, but God does not allow him to enjoy them.

- **For a happy life,** you need not only to have money and love, you need the ability to enjoy the things God gives you, and that is a separate gift of God you have to seek in a different way.

I was reminded of what the Hip-Hop star Drake said in an interview: *There was a point where I felt like I needed to keep the company of a different woman every night. I was trying to fill a void. But in those moment after sex, I'd know it wasn't working. Those quiet moments are the realest moments a man will ever have in his life... the next day I'd convince myself to do it again. But during that time, I knew it wasn't working.*⁶

SAME AS Solomon says. So, Solomon says that pleasure and power are unfulfilling, by themselves, he also says they are...

B. Fleeting

For a number of reasons. First of all, when you die, you are dead, and nothing you have accomplished benefits you anymore.

Here's how Solomon pretty aptly says that. **As a man came from his mother's womb, so he will go again, naked as he came; he will take nothing for his efforts that he can carry in his hands.** ¹⁶ This too is a sickening tragedy: exactly as he comes, so he will go. **(5:15)**

- You came naked, you leave naked. It doesn't matter how much you accomplish, you go out like you came in.
- Jerry Seinfeld who became famous for making a show about the absurdity, **the hevel, of life**, says it really starts before death: "Your last birthday and your first one are very similar... *You just kinda sit there...you're the least excited person at the party. You don't even really realize that there is a party. At both, people help you blow out the candles, you can't do it...you don't even know why you're doing it.*"
- You are like, "What is this ritual? What is going on?"
- At your first birthday party and your last one other people have to gather your friends together *for* you. Sometimes they're not even your friends. They decide. They bring 'em in, they sit 'em down, and they tell you: 'these are your friends! Tell them, "Thank you for coming to my birthday party!"
- You go out just like you came in.
- No matter what you accomplish, in death, usually even in old age!, you can't really enjoy it.
- I've told you: **Steve Jobs really struggled with this:** "reason I didn't put on/off switches... When we die, that's it? All this accomplishment just dies with us?" The answer: Apart from God, yes!

In light of that, Solomon asks, **What does the one gain who struggles for the wind?** ¹⁷ **What is more, he eats in darkness all his days, with much frustration, sickness, and anger. (5:15–17)**

- **"Eat in darkness"** means you work late, eat alone.

⁶ I have edited his words for clarity. <http://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/a2465/drake-looks-for-love-608879/>

- But then you die, and you can't take any of it with you so you leave it to a trust fund kid who doesn't appreciate it and they just waste it.
- You say, "But they will always remember how awesome I was."
- Not really. Like I told you, after your funeral, they gather up all your prize possessions and say, "What are we going to do with all this junk?" and they hold up your clothes and make fun of them.
- **Mark Twain:** The world laments you for an hour, and it forgets you forever.
- **And even if they do say some nice things about you**, you can't hear them. Because you're dead.
- **So, be encouraged!**

Furthermore, Solomon says, what we do doesn't even make that big of an impact: "Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. (1:4) All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome (hevel) (1:4, 7-8)

- **IOW, we don't leave that big of impact.**
 - (E.g. Sometimes when I am at the ocean, I wonder, "How much change has this ocean seen?" Technology changes. Styles. Yet year after year it keeps doing the same things. It never changes.
 - The tide comes in and is like, "Oh, you are still here?"
- And our **accomplishments amount to little.**
 - When I was young, I used the **Strong's Concordance** spent his whole life writing what we can do today in 10 minutes
- **And our work is so fragile.** It could be wiped out at any minute by an earthquake or solar flare.
 - Do you ever watch when you knock over an anthill how the ants immediately go about scurrying to rebuild. They don't even stop to complain. "**Awww.... Come on, man!**" They just go right back to work, not knowing, of course, that I can come back and do it all again tomorrow. That's

what we're like... all this activity, and one solar flare and we're toast.

- ***Aren't you glad you came to church today? Let's pray!***

One more thing that makes the pursuit of pleasure and power absurd is that life is...

C. Unpredictable

Solomon spends a lot of time talking about how blind chance plays a huge role in all our lives...

- "Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them." (9:11)
- Two people make the exact same life decisions: one ends up a billionaire; the other ends up poor!
- Not even righteous living guarantees success: "In my futile life I have seen everything: someone righteous perishes in spite of his righteousness, and someone wicked lives long in spite of his evil." (7:15)

Which leads to the 2nd absurdity Solomon notes...

II. The absurdity of pursuing wisdom

I said to myself, "My mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge." I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind. (1:16)

- What? This is from the guy who wrote Proverbs. Pursuing wisdom is also absurd, he says, for a few reasons:
- **First of all**, living righteously does not guarantee smooth sailing.
 - Chapter 10:8-9, The one who digs a pit may fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. This is a **quote from Proverbs** about how those who pursue evil will end up having it come back on them.

And it does. But consider the next verse. ⁹The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them; the one who splits logs may be endangered by them. Sometimes the one who works honestly gets hurt!

- And you just look at things and say, “What the hevel!.”
- **Second**, you can never really figure out the ways of God.
 - “No one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end.” (Ecc 3:11)
 - Some of God’s work you may be able to grasp, but a lot of it you’ll never be able to understand. And the fact that you can understand some of it just frustrates you—well, why is this happening?
 - If you’re like me, you often find yourself stuck between a rock and hard place—you can’t become an atheist—too much evidence for God for that; but how can you believe in a good God who controls everything when these crazy things happen?
- **Thirdly**, he says, it is futile to seek wisdom because **the more you know, the more you just realize you don’t know**: “Be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. (12:12)
 - **And every student says, “AMEN!”**
 - For everything you learn, you realize there is more you don’t know...
 - **E.g. Parenting: Every book I read on parenting leaves me feeling far less competent as a parent.** Can I get an Amen? The most competent I’ve ever felt as a parent was before I had kids. I’d read 4 books on parenting; and I had no kids but 4 great sermons on parenting. Now I have 4 kids and no great sermons on parenting.
 - **At least ones I feel confident**—usually I’m like, “I think... you go try and out tell me if it works.”

So, Solomon says, “Trying to gain wisdom as a way of mastering life is foolish.” **You try to learn everything there is to know about**

parenting and you still look at your kid and say, “I don’t know what the hevel is going on with him.”

Finally, Solomon points to...

III. The Absurdity of Worldly Justice

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. (8:14)

I think we all tend to get pretty discouraged now because we look around and see so many places where justice is not prevailing.

- The powerful aren’t held to account. Someone gets wrongly blamed; someone gets smeared in public opinion who didn’t deserve it. The true story, the real history, never got told.
- And **if you are insistent on every just cause** being settled under the sun you’re going to lose your mind.
- It’s not that we should quit fighting for justice, just that Solomon recognizes that to some level full justice is impossible to attain under the sun.

No matter what you do—life is hevel. Wisdom doesn’t guarantee success; time and chance affect us all; bad luck affects all of us.

This is the WORST SERMON! I know... It is Solomon’s!

So, what do you do with all of this?

(We’ll get more into this next week...)

1. Fear God

The last verses of the book: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into

judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”
(12:13–14)

- Here, at the very end, the Editor takes us back “over the sun.” **There is a God, he says, who will bring ultimate** justice. And with whom we will live and enjoy in perfect happiness for eternity. Who will reward good and punish evil.
- **We may not be able to tell just by reflection** if there’s any value to living righteously, or even if human life has more value than animal life! But this is not the only book in the Bible... The Bible is God’s message from OVER THE SUN.
 - **There’s a famous statue called “the thinker”** where Rodin is sitting there looking within... this is not Ecclesiastes.
 - The speaker is called “the Teacher.” He is telling us about things we can’t find by looking within, but things we have to be told from above.
- And God declares, “You will die and after this you will face judgment.” And **if you are wise you will live in a way** where you are prepared to give an account.
- And, it is **true that no one** can comprehend God’s work under the sun. But just because I can’t see meaning under the sun doesn’t mean there isn’t any.
- Ecclesiastes’ purpose in showing you the absurdity of life is not to turn you into an atheist, and it is trying to make you into a humble theist!
 - It is saying, “Put up your simplistic Proverbs-formulas and realize that there’s a lot of life you really can’t explain yet, but that’s ok because there is a God who is bigger than all of it and you know him!”
- **I told you that Ecclesiastes pairs with Proverbs**, and you have to read both together. Well, the book also pairs with Job. In fact, these 3 Wisdom Books—Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—are the Bible’s answer to the absurdity of life.
 - **Job was a guy who had everything go wrong after he did everything right.** And he **never quite understood** what was going on, and that’s because there was a backstory in

the heavens that he never even knew about! The book of Job opens up with an argument in heaven’s court between Satan and God, where Satan says the only reason any humans worship you is because you give them stuff. And God says, “No, some recognize that I am the greatest possession” and so Job becomes the test case that proves to Satan and all the demons that God is worthy to be worshipped for himself. But Job never understood that, under the sun. To him, it just felt like hevel.

- **In the same way, some things we go through will never have answers on earth, under the sun.** They will remain a paradox for us until we get to heaven just like they did for Job.
- **In its own strange way, the writer of Ecclesiastes** points you forward to Jesus. You look around and say, “Is there no point? Is there no justice?” But then **Jesus shows up in the NT and says, “There is! God has not forgotten you.”**
- **You say, “Maybe we’re just like the animals, and our bodies just rot like theirs do after we die.”** But Jesus’ resurrection says, “No, you mattered so much to me that I purchased your soul with my blood so I could raise you up to eternal life with me, to take you into my presence (Ps 16:11).”
- **We say, “Nothing I’m doing makes a difference, it’s all hevel!”** And Paul says, “No, through the resurrection, you can be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because we know (through the resurrection) that our labor is not in vain in the Lord!”

2. Enjoy every moment of life that you can

- In one sense, you need to **embrace the absurdity, randomness, constantly-changing chaos** of life and just enjoy it in the moment.
- **Really important, repeated more than 6x.** So much more on this next week.
- You’ll never be able to guarantee success, absolute security or perfect justice in this life. You’ll have to wait for eternity for that...

- **But in the meantime**, God has created a good life with really good pleasures—things like the beauties of nature, romance, food, good drink. So, enjoy them when you can!
 - **Some of you are so bothered by injustices or consumed** with the pursuit of more that you can't enjoy the present.
 - This happened to me **just this week**: I was so consumed with the perceived slight of injustice that I was on able to actually enjoy time with my kids.
 - **The present is the only place you can find joy—not in the past, not in the future.**
- "This is good for a man: Eat well, drink a good glass of wine, accept his position in life, and enjoy his work whatever his job may be, for however long the Lord may let him live." Ecc 5:18, NLT
- **Interesting: Friendship is never spoken negatively of in Ecclesiastes!**
- IOW, have good friends, enjoy your food, relish time with your wife and kids if you have them, try to find some enjoyment in your work, and live to the hilt every moment in front of you—and stop dreaming/romanticizing about the past and or yearning for the future. **Enjoy today! (MORE NEXT WEEK)**

3. Seek a God greater than the Hevel

- A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and enjoy their work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? (2:24)
 - Joy in life is a gift that God gives. It does not come automatically with riches or relationships.
- **So, who gets it?** For to the person who is pleasing in his sight, he gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy... (2:24–26)
 - Who is pleasing in his sight? You are. The child of God is.
- **How did you become that way? In Christ!** The gospel is that Jesus lived the life that was well-pleasing to God, but then died the death of futility we were supposed to die.

- You might even say it this way: **Jesus lived the Proverbs life** (he followed it all perfectly!) **but he would experience the Ecclesiastes death.**
 - **Jesus experienced the hevel** brought on by our sin in Genesis 3—he went to hevel for us—so that we could know all the assurances and certainty of the promises of God who says that "*all things work together for good to them who love God, who are called according to his purpose,*" a God "*who work all things according the counsels of his will.*"
 - **Heb 13:5;**
 - **Ps 23:6**
 - **No hair falls from our head**
 - **He took our place under hevel so we could live a life of meaning, security, and absolute love before the eternal Father.**
- **God has not given us an airtight philosophy of wisdom or iron-clad guarantees of success. He has given us an airtight Person to walk with and in whom we can hide during the vicissitudes of life: Jesus: the wisdom of God**, who never changes—who is the guarantee of our inheritance, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Conclusion:

- Ecclesiastes, in its own strange way, points you forward to Jesus
- **Our friend Joby: Here's** how we should see the coming of Jesus in light of Ecclesiastes. He takes us back to the anthill:

"The vacant lot next to the place where I lived in college was full of carpenter ants. When I would leave for class, the neighbor's kid would be on his Big Wheel. (Remember those? They're about this high so cars couldn't see you and you were sure to die.) He would go to the vacant lot and spread jelly all over the place, and the ants would put on Facebook, "Hey, come get the jelly at Joby's

place!” The kid would wait until all the ants got there and then power slide with his big wheel through the lot and kill all the ants.

Now, if I loved ants and wanted to communicate with them, it would be impossible to try to stand over them and say, “Hear ye, hear ye, all ye ants! Thou shalt not eat the jelly, because it will lead to thy death.” They would just look at me and say, “Look at the size of that boot.”

But if I were just an ant, I wouldn’t have the perspective to understand that psycho Big Wheel kid is on his way with jelly and death. So, I would need to simultaneously be big and powerful enough to have the right perspective and see their future and yet small as an ant to be able to communicate with them—to grow up like an ant, speak ant language, and yet still have the right perspective.

And then one day, at just the right time, I would become an ant and enter the colony and say, “Behold, ants! Follow me. I know the jelly tastes good. But look around. See all the ant legs and squished body parts? That’s going to be you one day. Follow me across the street where there’s no psycho Big Wheel kid—because his mom won’t let him cross the street.”

That’s what the coming of Jesus is like, SORT OF.

The call of Ecclesiastes is to give up control of your life to one you may not be able to understand but whom you can trust. A God bigger than the hevel, A GOD WHO WENT THROUGH HEVEL so you could know security and happiness through him.

Now, **come back next week for practical instruction** for how to live in light of this!

