

The End of the Matter – Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

“Searching for meaning” – September 15, 2019



Introduction

Jesus once asked, “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself” (Lk. 9:25). The answer to His question is *nothing*. To gain the whole world and all it has to offer us this side of heaven: money, applause, praise, comfort, pleasure, etc. and yet to lose your soul does not bring profit. As we see in our text today, death is the great equalizer. No matter what temporary ‘gain’ we find in this world, it doesn’t equate to a ‘profit’ in the balance sheet of life at the end of the day because death steals any ‘gain’ we had. How then can we live and find what the good life is in light of death? The Preacher shows us how.

Pray

Before you begin, take some time to ask God to help you understand His word, to reveal what needs to change in you, and for the grace to follow Him in response. To help, use [Psalm 119:33-40](#) as a prayer for God to open His word up to you.

Sermon Outline

- I. Every pursuit for gain (under the sun) is a dead end (1:12-2:11)
- II. It’s a dead end because death is your end (2:12-23)
- III. Enjoy the gift...worship the Giver (2:24-26)

Read & Discuss

- 1) Read [Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11](#)

After preaching that all is vain because there is no gain to be found under the sun (see 1:2-3), the Preacher now opens his life to us that he might show from *experience* his point. With wisdom still at his side, he experiments with wisdom (1:12-18) and pleasure (2:1-11) to see if they hold the answer to making life under the sun *worth it*.

Wisdom helps us to see the world rightly (he’ll make this point even clearer in 2:13), but it has its limits. It cannot solve the problem of death – it cannot make straight what God has made crooked (1:15). What conclusion does the preacher make after searching out answers in wisdom (see 1:16-18)? Wisdom and knowledge are gifts of God – how are we at risk of misusing those gifts?

After pursuing wisdom and finding it ‘a striving after wind’ (1:17), the Preacher turns to pleasure. Here, pleasure is not a *sinful* thing – it is looking at what God’s gifts have to offer in terms of gain under the sun. He will look to laughter (2:2), wine (v3), work, houses (vv4-6), leisure (v7), wealth (v8a), entertainment (v8b), and sex (v8c). He held nothing back (v9-10), but his conclusion was even pleasure was a striving after wind (v11). Have you ever experienced the temporary enjoyment of some gift of God, experienced its *fleeting* nature only to ask, “Is this it?” It is it! There is temporary enjoyment in the task itself (as 2:10 explains),

but to look for enjoyment that lasts, that brings ultimate gain, significance and contentment...that is a chasing after wind because it's not why God gave His gifts. Are there ways you are *living* as if wisdom or pleasure *do* produce the gain we long for? Take some time to pray & reflect on where that might be.

Additional Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6, Philippians 4:10-13

2) Read [Ecclesiastes 2:12-23](#)

The great equalizer, once again, is death. We can't take the temporary gains with us and so finally, the Preacher despairs of hoping the gifts of God *will*. Despair is usually a bad thing, but when we despair of our idolatry, it can lead us to trust in the one and only God who can deliver what His gifts were never meant to provide. Have you ever thought of 'despair' (2:20) as a helpful medicine to help us trust and rely on God?

Additional Reading: 1 Peter 1:6-7, Psalm 119:67

3) Read [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#)

Enjoy! Eat, drink, and enjoy your toil – not because there is no God (contrast 1 Cor. 15:32) but because there *is* a God and He has given us these gifts and gives the ability to enjoy them. Enjoyment is a gift from God which reminds us that it is experienced in a relationship with God where we follow God's design for those gifts as laid out in Scripture. So, eat and drink (yes!) but don't be gluttonous or drunk (Eph. 5:18, Prov. 23:20). Enjoy God's gifts, not as a god that can save you...but as a gracious gift from a generous, loving God. Are you grateful for God's kindness and gifts? Do you see them as something He owes you or as an expression of His love and mercy (see Romans 6:23 and 2:4)? Take time to thank God and pray for Him to cultivate a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving in you and our church family to maximize joy!

Additional Reading: James 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:17

Prayer of Response

1) After hearing God's Word, what sin do I need to *confess*? From what do I need to *repent*?

2) How should my life be lived this week based on what I have heard? What should I *understand*, *believe*, *desire*, or *do*?

Spend time praying together in response to God's word asking for His help and greater faith to follow Him in the week to come.

If you missed the sermon on Sunday or would like to listen again, visit our website at <https://fbcum.org/sermons-new/>

*Next week's sermon text: we turn to Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 "A Time for Everything"
