

The End of the Matter – Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

“The end of the matter” – January 26, 2020



Introduction

Ecclesiastes begins with the statement ([1:2](#)) and ends with the statement ([12:8](#)) that describes the nature of life: *vanity*. By that we've learned that life is fleeting and ungraspable (like a vapor) – there will be things we can't understand or control...only God can. How then are we to live when all is vanity, a vapor? For twelve chapters, the Preacher has labored to show us how to live wisely in a world broken by sin. In this epilogue (a summary and conclusion), the Preacher gives us reasons *why* we should listen and follow what he's taught.

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. Ecclesiastes is a trustworthy witness (12:9-12)
- II. Ecclesiastes shows us the only way to live (12:13-14)

Read & Discuss

- 1) Read [Ecclesiastes 12:9-12](#)

To show us that his testimony is trustworthy, we find 3 arguments regarding the nature of the teacher and what he taught:

- a) Wise (v9) – In all his searching, *he* maintained wisdom ([Ecc. 2:3, 9](#)). The teacher was not sloppy, but organized things with great care. As a result, we can be confident he got the meaning straight; he arrived at the right conclusion.
- b) Delightful (v10a) – Delightful does not equal trustworthy (See Prov. 5:4), so this is not the sole argument. But knowing that the intent of the teaching is for our good and not our harm helps us trust it. Consider the Preacher's call to joy throughout the book in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 3:12, 3:22, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7, and 11:9. Without ignoring the reality of pain and suffering, the Preacher shows us the path to joy in a confusing world. How would you summarize that path according to Ecclesiastes' teaching? In other words, what is true about God and what are we called to do in response to find such joy?
- c) True (v10b-11) – Undergirding everything is the fact that these are 'words of truth'. At the end of the day we know because they are given by God Himself (or 'one Shepherd' as we see in 12:11 [compare with [Psalm 23:1](#)]). As our good Shepherd, God leads us, His sheep, with His word. A 'goad' is a tool of the shepherd – it's a long stick with a pointy end used to gently

prod the sheep when they are stubborn or veering off the path they should be on. When God's word confronts or corrects you, how do you respond? How does knowing God's heart for our good help us to receive this correction with humility and trust (see [James 1:19-22](#))?

Based on the 3 arguments for the trustworthiness of the instruction in Ecclesiastes, what is the response we are called to in 12:12? Why does our heart often look for a second opinion when following God gets tough?

Additional Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 12:3-11

2) Read [Ecclesiastes 12:13-14](#)

Here is the conclusion of the book after all has been heard. Our whole duty (of every person) is clear: *fear God and keep His commandments*. This isn't the first time we've heard the call to fear God (see Ecc. 3:13, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12-13). Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way: "To fear God is another way of saying 'knowing God.' It is a heart-felt love for God because of who He is and what He has done; a sense of being in His majestic presence. It is a thrilling awareness that we have the *greatest* of all privileges, mingled with a realization that now the only thing that matters is His opinion...To fear God is to be sensitive to both His greatness and His graciousness. It is to know Him and love Him wholeheartedly and unreservedly. *To fear God, to trust God, to love God, and to know God – these are really one and the same thing.*"¹

With this in mind, we're called to look to the end of our life (12:14) and let the end shape how we live in the present. For the Christian, the sting of death has been removed (see [1 Corinthians 15:54-58](#)), therefore death need not be something we fear but see as 'gain' ([Philippians 1:21](#)). How should our end shape the decisions, values, ambitions, and hopes that we have today? Take some time to discuss and pray about this in light of Ecclesiastes.

Additional Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

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 Luke 9:57-62 "Our Top Priority"
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¹ *The Pundit's Folly*, by Sinclair Ferguson, pg. 74