

Everything under the sun ... and then some

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- [Green = PowerPoint slide]
- *Ecclesiastes: the Interpretive Key*
- Plans for an Evangelistic Drama - Partially written
 - *I invite your critiques, comments, suggestions, etc.*
- Background - My personal struggle with Ecclesiastes:
 - It gives some spectacularly unspiritual advice:
 - 7:16 - “Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?”
 - 8:15 - “So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.”
 - 9:3 - “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.”
 - 9:7 - “Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.”
 - I bought **books** looking to make sense of this book (DISAPPOINTMENTS!)
 - I sensed there was a great message here if I could just discern it!

Breakthrough!

- October, 1999 or 2000, sitting on the swing outside my house with Bible in my lap
- *“Under the sun”* and *“under heaven”* appear 34 times in 12 short chapters!
 - 1:3 - “What advantage does man have in all his work which he does **under the sun**?”
 - 2:11 - “Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit **under the sun**.”
 - 2:17 - “So I hated life, for the work which had been done **under the sun** was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.” *[v. 17 starts 4 verses in a row]*
 - 4:1 - “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done **under the sun**.”
 - 9:15 - “So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man **under the sun** except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him **under the sun**.”

- A clue as to the parameters of his inquiry?
- **My theory:** What if he was saying that he would leave **revealed religion** and the **possibility of an afterlife** out of his inquiry?
- I reread it with those lenses and **Eureka!**

Solomon's Project – A brief look at Ecclesiastes

- Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (SLIDE)
- 3,000 years ago, King Solomon of Israel completed one of the greatest **philosophical** enquiries in history
 - Why I say “**philosophical**” and not “**theological**”—it had partially Theological in its aims, but used philosophical & scientific **means** to get there
- Solomon's goal was to figure out as much as he could about God's plan for people and their time on earth **without** resorting to the Law, **without** resorting to the traditions passed onto him, **without** resorting to what even simple people could know about the most important things in life through religion, **without looking beyond the sun for answers!**
- Solomon wanted to figure it **all** out by himself! And he was uniquely qualified –
 - **Describe** 1 Kings 3:5-15:
 - Read SLIDE – v12: “behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.”
 - **Describe** 1 Kings 4:29-34 – READ 4:29 (SLIDE)
 - “Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.”
- So I've concluded that, as Solomon realized the extent of his analytical abilities and that he was seeing bigger & bigger parts of the puzzle, he started to think that he could *figure it ALL out, the WHOLE puzzle, WITHOUT the Bible!*
- Solomon clearly states this object in Ecclesiastes 1:13 (SLIDE):
 - “And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning **all** that has been done under heaven.”
- **INDUCTION** vs. **DEDUCTION**
- **Explain** General Revelation (Natural Law) vs Special Revelation (Revealed Religion)
 - SLIDE: Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”

- Now Solomon was *not* an Atheist—he was too wise for that (seeing the **design** in the Universe as he did) and besides, God had appeared to him **twice**—and he wasn't anti-God or anti-religion, he just wanted to figure things out for himself and realized that if anyone in history had the wealth, power and intelligence to unravel the mysteries of life—to discover the secrets hidden within God's General Revelation—it was *him*
- He set about trying to unravel the very fabric of life **under the sun** ... as God had set it up. What was a man truly capable of doing **under heaven**?
 - Since his life had so much potential—he was super rich, super powerful and super smart—he wanted to figure out the secrets to maximizing his life—maximum *pleasure*, maximum *productivity*, maximum *impact*, maximum *fame*, maximum *influence*, maximum *legacy*!
- Not only did Solomon decide to leave revealed religion out of his quest (while acknowledging the existence of God) he also **began by** leaving out the hope of **some sort of afterlife**. He did this with the goal of determining what a man must do to get as much meaning and satisfaction as possible out of **this life—under the sun**—without resorting to whatever might or might not happen later

Solomon's Three Primary Goals:

- I've concluded in my study of **Ecclesiastes** that Solomon's Project had 3 main goals:
 1. **He** would develop a philosophy of the Good Life. What can man do during his time under the sun to experience as much meaning and happiness and joy as possible?
 2. **He** would figure out as much as he could about what God had already done in making and governing this world, but without relying on revealed religion to do it. He would use all his powers of observation and contemplation—in other words, Science—to look far into the past and induce what God had done.
 3. **He** would understand God's purpose in putting man on the earth for the few years of this life. What does God want us to do? What is God trying to accomplish with us? Is there some great goal in all this that can be discerned in the very nature of our lives?
- And he went about it *systematically*
 - He would start by exploring the extremes of *madness/folly/pleasure* on one end and *wisdom* on the other and then all the ground *in between*
 - **SLIDE: How to Maximize Meaning & Happiness Under the Sun**
 - **Ecc 2:1-** “1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. 2I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” 3I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6I made ponds of water for myself from which to

irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7I bought male and female slaves, and I had home born slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. 9Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit **under the sun.**”

- He **PARTIED (Hedonism)** and he had **BUILT (Wisdom)**
- **PARTIED** -
 - If anyone had the capacity to party hard, it was Solomon! Rich, powerful, smart, famous. He had 1,000 women!
 - But he quickly despaired of partying because it kept him from accomplishing anything—it was a colossal waste of time and talent (**Eph. 5:18** “... *for that is dissipation*”)
- He eventually settled on a **hybrid** of the two extremes & accomplished great things, mixing productivity with pleasure
- **BUILT** -
 - He used wisdom to accumulate **Experiences, Things and Accomplishments**
 - Concluding Wisdom is indeed better than Hedonism

But by the end of Chapter 2, Solomon was seriously depressed!

- Ecclesiastes 2:15 - 26
 - All work **under the sun** is full of **frustrations** and **setbacks** and **hassles!**
 - Everything you build needs constant maintenance or else it goes to pot!
 - Solomon knew his legacy of great buildings and institutions would be **wasted** because he wouldn’t be around to ensure it was well maintained
 - He also saw that whether you’re wise or foolish, **everybody dies** and quickly becomes **unimportant to the living**—
 - **THE BIG PROBLEM IS DEATH! IT’S THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT**
 - So a truly satisfying legacy is impossible!
 - And even if it was, he wouldn’t be around to enjoy it!
 - **THE GAME WAS RIGGED!!**

"Done Too Soon" by Neil Diamond

Jesus Christ, Fanny Brice, Wolfie Mozart and Humphrey Bogart

And Genghis Khan and on to H. G. Wells, Ho Chi Minh, Gunga Din, Henry Luce and John Wilkes Booth and Alexanders King and Graham Bell, Ramar Krishna, Mama Whistler, Patrice Lumumba and Russ Colombo, Karl and Chico Marx, Albert Camus, E. A. Poe, Henri Rousseau, Sholom Aleichem and Caryl Chessman, Alan Freed and Buster Keaton too And each one there Has one thing shared: They have

sweated beneath the same sun, Looked up in wonder at the same moon And wept when it was all done; For bein' done too soon, For bein' done too soon, For bein' done.

- **Paraphrase of the end of chapter 2:** “So, what should you do? My ultimate conclusion filled me first with rage, and then despair: *I determined that there's really only one thing you can do: eat and drink and tell yourself that your labor is good. (Beat) That's right: tell yourself that it means something; pretend that it's important!* It's helpful to stay cheerful and not let yourself fall into despair, so don't think too deeply about things. It's not very intellectually satisfying, but it's the only thing that works. Oh, you don't like that? You think that it's not fair? Tough! *That's the way the world is and good luck changing it! It can't be done!* [2:24]

Phase 2 of Solomon's Project

- But Solomon still had 2 goals left (Read repeated Slides for #2 and #3)
 - This phase took much longer than the 1st—it seems Solomon reflected for many years
 - He spent a lot of time reflecting on all the things he saw wrong with **life under the sun:**
1. **God has put a limit on what man can discover.** Some of the “No Peeking” signs are bigger than the windows they cover!
Eccles 8:16-17 - “When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.”
 2. **He saw that justice and righteousness are seldom done under the sun.**
Eccles 4:1-2 - “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.”
 3. **THERE IS SOMETHING THE MATTER WITH MANKIND**
 - a. Eccles 7:29 - “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices
 - b. Eccles. 9:3 - “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.”

Justice and **Logic** Demand a Reckoning **AND** Another Age!

- **Solomon Eventual Conclusion** : “If justice is not carried out satisfactorily under the sun in this precision-crafted world ... **and** if man can conceive of the good, the just and the eternal under the sun even though he can't see them with his eyes ... **and** since man cannot achieve a just, lasting and satisfying Legacy under the sun no matter how hard he tries and no matter how good or wise he is ... **then** the tightness in the moral universe I have seen and the universal longings of mankind

demand that there be a *just reckoning* and a *lasting legacy* for all men at *some time ... somewhere!*
We just don't know *where* yet. We just don't know *when*.”

- *You have to look past the sun for your ultimate meaning and consolation because they can't be found under the sun!*

SLIDE: The Day of Judgment and an Afterlife are LOGICALLY NECESSARY!

- *Read Ecclesiastes 11:9*
- *Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8*
- *Read Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*

OPTIONAL

Finally, Ecclesiastes falls into line with the rest of Scripture!

- **SLIDE - Read Romans 8:18-25**
- **SLIDE - Read Hebrews 6:18-19** - “... we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to **take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast ...**”

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