

THE BIG READ (43)

Jesus in Ecclesiastes

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The final section of the Old Testament is the Writings.

Whereas the Prophets looked back to what happened to Israel and why it happened in order to call the nation to repent and return to God, the Writings looked forward to the hope that was coming to those who repent, through a King like David, and showed those who did, how to live faithfully in all of life’s circumstances as they waited for His arrival.

This means that though the books found in the Writings sections were written at different points in Israel’s history, it was after the Babylonian exile was over, that they were collected together to give the remnant hope and guidance as they waited.

3. In the book of Proverbs, we learnt both why we should live wisely and how we can live wisely.

The book of Ecclesiastes, the next book in the Writings, presses home our need to live wisely.

B. Getting Started with Ecclesiastes

1. The name of the book, Ecclesiastes, comes from the opening phrase, “The words of the Teacher.”

Teacher is the English translation of the Hebrew word ‘Qoholet’ which means ‘to assemble’.

The Teacher is literally ‘the assembler’, and the assumption is made, that the assembler is gathering a group of people together in order to teach them wisdom.

But who is this Teacher? To put the question another way, who is the author of Ecclesiastes?

2. It is generally agreed that Ecclesiastes is the second book in the Writings written by Solomon (the first being Proverbs).

Certainly Solomon seems to fit the description of the Teacher.

He was the son of David and the king of Jerusalem.

"The words of the Teacher, son of David, king of Jerusalem." (Ecclesiastes 1:1)

He possessed great wisdom.

"I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge."
(Ecclesiastes 1:16)

He indulged in every kind of pleasure.

"I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good."
(Ecclesiastes 2:1)

He was a builder (see also 1 Kings 6-7)

"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees." (Ecclesiastes 2:4-6)

He had great wealth.

"I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasures of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man." (Ecclesiastes 2:8)

He wrote and collected proverbs.

"Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs." (Ecclesiastes 12:9)

3. If Solomon is the author, and I think he is, Ecclesiastes, most likely was written near the end of his life.

Whereas the prophets tell us only of Solomon's apostasy, Ecclesiastes completes the story by describing a Solomon who after many years of backsliding, repents.

In addition to expressing the personal repentance of Solomon, Ecclesiastes was also an exhortation from the king to the people of Israel who had followed his backsliding path, to repent as well.

Sadly, Israel both at the end of Solomon's reign, and afterwards, failed to listen to his wise words.

Now by including Ecclesiastes in the Writings section of the Old Testament, the people after the exile was over, were being encouraged not to make the same mistakes that previous generations had.

4. So how does Solomon urge and press home the need of the remnant of God's people reading Ecclesiastes to live wisely?

"The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails – given by one Shepherd." (Ecclesiastes 12:10-11)

Solomon's words (given by God, the one Shepherd) here in Ecclesiastes are like goads and nails.

The "goads" are the verses that prod the reader to think, to evaluate, and are like that pointed stick that guides animals to a desired destination.

The "nails" are the verses that give fixed and firmly embedded truths about God that the goads are directing the reader towards, with the aim that they live a life of faith in Him.

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Chapter 12:9-14: The problem of life under the sun is settled

6. What are some of the things we learn from Solomon's study of life under the sun?

Why does life in this fallen and cursed world seem pointless and purposeless? (the goad-like words)

"What does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:3)

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

"There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow." (Ecclesiastes 1:11)

"The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realise that the same fate overtakes them both." (Ecclesiastes 2:14)

"I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19)

"Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors – and they have no comforter." (Ecclesiastes 4:1)

"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income." (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

"Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labour that he can carry in his hand." (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

"God gives a man wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil." (Ecclesiastes 6:2)

"This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterwards they join the dead." (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

Why has God cursed this fallen world so that it seems pointless and purposeless? (the nail-like words)

"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)

"I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." (Ecclesiastes 3:10-14)

"Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God." (Ecclesiastes 5:7)

"Wisdom is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." (Ecclesiastes 7:12-14)

“Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.” (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13)

Only those who fear God and who are trusting in Christ can truly enjoy life in this fallen and cursed world.

D. Jesus in Ecclesiastes

1. Jesus rescues us from a meaningless life.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

He experienced the frustration of the pointlessness and purposelessness of life in this fallen and cursed world that ends in judgment on the cross to redeem us from it.

Jesus rescues us from a meaningless life by removing God’s curse that is upon us.

2. Jesus restores to us a meaningful life.

By rescuing us from a meaningless life, He restores meaning again to it.

“Then I realised that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.” (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

Without Christ “Everything is meaningless”, with Christ we “may have life, and have it to the full” both now and on into eternity.

It is therefore foolish not to follow Him and listen to His voice.

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Do this while you are young.

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Do this before it is too late.

“For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:14)