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## Lessons from the **Book of Ecclesiastes**

By Ken Raggio

### **Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes, "The Preacher," catalogues Solomon's frustrations with life "under the sun." "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" His observations only apply to the mortal life, not the hereafter. That agrees with New Testament teachings. James said, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away," (4:14).

Ecclesiastes 1:14 - "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

### **Earthly Possessions Are Temporary At Best**

Solomon gave himself to mirth and pleasure. He got houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards, pools, servants, maidens, singers, musicians, silver, gold and peculiar treasures of kings. "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. ...it was from the hand of God." But earthly possessions are temporary.

Ecclesiastes 2:18 - "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me."

### **God Appoints Times And Seasons**

God sets a time and a season for every purpose under heaven. "A time to be

born, and a time to die; ...to plant, ...to pluck up; ...to kill, ...to heal; ...to break down, ...to build up; ...to weep, ...to laugh; ...to mourn, ...to dance; ...to cast away stones, ...to gather stones together; ...to embrace, ...to refrain from embracing; ...to get, ...to lose; ...to keep, ...to cast away; ...to rend, ...to sew; ...to keep silence, ...to speak; ...to love, ...to hate; ...of war, ...of peace."

Ecclesiastes 3:11 - "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time."

### **Two Are Better Than One**

Solomon became cynical, watching the tears of the oppressed, observing that they had no comforter. Oppressors had power, but the poor had no comforter. The dead are better off than the living (or the unborn), he said. He marvelled at men's jealousy of one another, since everyone seemed miserable anyway. Solitary men with no family worked endlessly, and for what? Vanity, he said. Those who have someone to work with, to sleep with, to walk with fare better. He argued that companions make a difference.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 - "Two are better than one; ...the one will lift up his fellow."

### **Abstain From Hasty Words And Rash Vows**

"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: ...let thy words be few. ...a fool's voice is known by multitude of words." If you make a vow to God, do not fail to pay it. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."

Ecclesiastes 5:6 - "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?"

### **Law of Diminishing Return**

Life on earth has little promise. In economics, any system that requires constantly increasing input to maintain equal output is said to have a diminishing return. That law dominates this world. Alcoholics require more liquor. Drug addicts need more drugs. More money. More food. More sex. More parties. Bigger houses. Fancier cars. Solomon concluded that life is a vain pursuit. Solution? Seek God's kingdom - only God can give unlimited satisfaction with no diminishing return.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 - "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled."

### **Prosperity**

God has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant. But sometimes, it also pleases the Lord to bruise His servant. God wants you and me to be blessed, but sometimes, for His glory, He needs us to endure some things that may drain us, even bankrupt us. Remember Job's trial. Learn how to prosper AND how to be abased.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 - "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him."

### **Sin, Sinners, And Their Delayed Sentence**

This generation actually believes they will get by with their heinous sins - deluded by the successes of multitudes of evil people. Why abandon riotous living if there is no punishment? The truth is heart-stopping. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 - "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, ...But it shall not be well with the wicked."

### **Some Things Will Never Be Revealed On Earth**

Every Bible believer is trained to seek the LORD in prayer and supplications. But no matter how you pray, some things will never be revealed on earth. "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other," (Reinhold Niebuhr).

Ecclesiastes 8:17 - "I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it."

### **The Dead Know Not Things On Earth**

Solomon asserted that when a man dies, his body returns to the dust. His spirit has no more awareness of what is going on in earth, "...for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" (3:22). "Wherefore I praised the dead... who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." Human spirits are very conscious in heaven or hell, but not on earth.

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 - "The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, ...Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished."

### **Inequities**

Modern culture worships overachievers. Two dozen millionaires play baseball to entertain 30,000 people in air-conditioned stadiums with television screens the size of cornfields. That mentality has migrated into religion. Mega-churches empty smaller churches with pseudo-Christian agendas - pop-culture teachings, and music played by pseudo-Christian musicians - not because they have exemplary relationships with God but because of stellar talents and celebrity status. "Ordinary" Christians who live by their Bibles, pray and live godly lives become impertinent.

Ecclesiastes 10:7 - "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth."

### **Cast Thy Bread Upon The Waters**

This is a curious, enigmatic statement. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." Its context reveals that it is a charge to invest, to give, to plant. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow." Give and you shall receive. The liberal soul shall be made fat. He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Ecclesiastes 11:6 - "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either

this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

### **The Afterlife**

It is the ultimate recall. From the moment God breathed the breath of life into Adam, man became a living soul. Since then, souls of men have been God's property. "All souls are mine," (Ezekiel 18:4). Our souls do not reincarnate into plants, animals, or newborn babies. They go back to God and will be disposed of according to His plan: sinners to hell, saints to heaven. No other options.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 - "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

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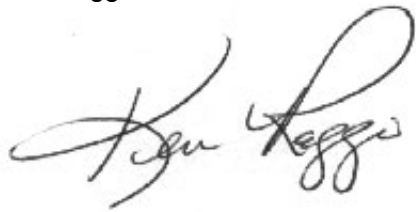
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