



# THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

CHASING THE WIND

Week 2

# WEEK 1 REVIEW

- Ecclesiastes is one of the books of wisdom literature in the OT, believed to be written by Solomon
- It is one of the few books of the Bible written in the first person, and explores the teacher's (Qoheleth's) struggle to find meaning in life.
- Chapter 1 outlines the Teacher's thesis: "All is vanity" (v. 2)
- The phrase "under the sun" (used 28 times) is a key phrase used to describe life on earth.
- Without God, life certainly seems meaningless

# KEY DISTINCTIONS TO MAKE

- There are actually two voices in the book of Ecclesiastes:
  - The "Teacher" (Qoheleth)
  - The Author (Solomon)
- הֶבֶל (hebel) is translated as "vanity" or "meaningless", but it means "vapor" or "breath." The teacher is not saying that life has no meaning, but rather that life's meaning is often obscure and unclear, like a vapor.

# BURSTING OUR BUBBLES

- The Teacher in Ecclesiastes sometimes seems like a jaded professor, taking the wind out of our sails with heavy topics such as the randomness of life, the paradoxes we face, the slow, inexorable march of time and the inevitability of death.
- His intent is not so much to lead us to despair, but to change our perspective on life; the goal is not to deconstruct God, but to deconstruct ourselves and the false god we wrongly create to make us feel better about a messy life.



Suggestion



# BURSTING OUR BUBBLES

- Have you ever been the naïve freshman? What about the jaded senior? Which outlook tends to be your default?
- When things go wrong, who is to blame – ourselves, God, or some other factor?
- If life is truly random and unjust, is it better to simply "stick with the hand we are dealt"? Why or why not?
- Have you ever considered what drives your pursuits in life? How do you know that your pursuits are worthwhile?

# HOW DO YOU LIVE A GOOD LIFE?

- Read Proverbs 3:21-22
- Proverbs says that one can live a good life by applying wisdom. Do you agree?
- The teacher actually agrees with Proverbs (Ecc. 9:13-18), but suggests that sometimes we can take it too far and use wisdom as a formula for success. The teacher is realistic about the complexities of life where short, pithy formulas don't always fit.

# HOW DO YOU LIVE A GOOD LIFE?

- Do we obsess over formulas to give us success? What are some examples of popular formulas for success in our culture?
- Life is not always reducible to a simple pattern or slogan. If we can't control it through formulas, what then do we do?
- The teacher outlines certain pursuits:



# PURSUING PLEASURE

- Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11
- What types of things does the teacher indulge in to find meaning?
- When is amusement right? When is it wrong?
- When is storing up wealth right? When is it wrong?
- When is having sex right? When is it wrong?
- When is having possessions right? When is it wrong?
- When is work or public service right? When is it wrong?
- When is fame right? When is it wrong?

# PURSUING PLEASURE

- Read 1 Kings 10:14-29
- What do you make of the excesses that characterized Solomon's later reign?
- Look at 1 Kings 11. The rest of Solomon's life was characterized by the pursuit of money, horses and women. The turning point was in the year he received 666 talents (22.8 metric tons) of gold. Is there a connection between that number and Solomon's apostasy?

# PURSUING PLEASURE

- Read Mark 8:36, Luke 12:15, 1 Timothy 6:10 and Hebrews 13:5-6. What do these passages say about the pursuit of material gain and true contentment?
- "In Ecclesiastes, we learn that without Christ we cannot be satisfied. Even if we possess the whole world, the heart is too large for the object. If we turn from the world and set our affections on Christ, we cannot fathom the infinite preciousness of His love – the object is too large for the heart."

# PURSUING WISDOM

- Read Ecclesiastes 2:12-26
- What did the teacher examine next? In what sense could his successor do only what he had done?
- Why did he dislike the idea of leaving his labors to someone else when he died? (v.18-21) What can we learn from that?

# PURSUING WISDOM

- What fate does the fool and the wise man share?
- Read verse 24 again. What is the teacher suggesting we should do? Is this an appropriate response? How is this different than the folly of the hedonism described in verses 1-11?
- According to verse 26, what does God give to someone who is good? What does God give to sinners?



# IT'S ABOUT TIME

- Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and fill out the worksheet provided. Then, discuss your answers.



# IT'S ABOUT TIME

- If all times and seasons are appointed by God, what room is there for human will and the operation of the grace and mercy of God?
- "When our life seems to fill up with so-called distracting or trivial matters such as cutting toenails, coughing, filling out tax forms, bathing, looking for lost things, we realize that we are but man and must live in this world. God wants to make all that we do holy by the motives and attitudes with which we do these things." - Paul Bucknell

# IT'S ABOUT TIME

- Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-15
- What does it mean that God "has put eternity in [our] hearts"?
- Read Romans 1:19-20. How does Paul address this inner awareness of something bigger than ourselves?
- God looks at time much differently than man (2 Peter 3:8). What does this tell us about how we relate to God?

# INJUSTICE AND FUTILITY

- Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-22
- What is the teacher's surprising discovery in verse 16? Have you seen this anywhere?
- How does God respond to injustice?
- Do you agree with Qoheleth that mankind is like animals? In what ways are we the same? In what ways are we different?