

CHASING THE WIND
“HOPE: Now & Eternal” Ecclesiastes 12:9-14
September 3, 2023

INTRO.: This past week was our first cross country race of the year. For the seventh graders it was their first cross country race and it is always exciting to see them grow and develop during the course of the season. It takes time to develop race strategy and to figure out a good pace. In those first races there is a tendency to start out way too fast and expend too much energy in the beginning. Throughout the season we design workouts to help develop a good race pace, one that allows them to finish well. There is also a strategy for finishing the race. We tell them to make sure they don't back off until after they cross the finish line. I have seen far too many runners begin to let up as they near the finish line and what happens? They get passed! This drives a coach crazy!! Over and over, we say, “Finish well!! Run through the finish line!” We encourage our senior saints to finish their race of life well for it matters to the younger generation. As Christians we're not to coast to the end of our lives, but to live all-out for the Lord until He calls us home. They need to see what that looks like. I was checking an update on a Nascar race a few weeks ago and one of the drivers ran out of gas and it cost him the race. He should have gone to pit road a few laps earlier so he could finish well. This morning we are reaching the end of our journey through the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes which we have entitled, *Chasing the Wind*. Throughout this book Solomon chronicles his search for meaning in life. He pursues wealth, possessions, pleasure, women, work, position, and power. At one point early in this book he says, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.” Yet, what was his conclusion?

Ecclesiastes 2:11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Remember what we said the word “*meaningless*” gives a picture of? It is a mist, vapor, smoke. Yesterday as I was driving across the Riverside bridge I saw this and knew I needed to get a picture. There was a fairly heavy fog over the water. How long did it last? Solomon's search for meaning to life was taken without God in the picture. What do we have in our lives without God in the picture? There's nothing we can really hold onto. After all that searching Solomon is coming to the grand conclusion which we see in these last 6 verses. As we read through and study these verses Solomon gives us true hope. With God, life matters!! In doing this, Solomon points to the importance of God's Word, what we call the Bible. We find hope in the pages of this book through a personal relationship with Almighty God. There are four things we see about God's Word:

God's Word is **Truth** (v. 9-10)

God's Word is **Unique** (v. 11-12)

God's Word is **Life-Changing** (v. 13)

God's Word is **a Warning** (v. 14)

Let's take the next few moments to read together Ecclesiastes 12:8-14. Notice the shift from everything being meaningless to God bringing meaning and purpose to all of life: true Hope.

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!” Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. 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. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. 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. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH v. 9-10

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

What does this say about who Solomon is and what his writings contain?

Solomon is described as one who is “wise,” and one who “imparted knowledge to the people.” This knowledge had to be more than just the accumulation of facts. Before he wrote he did three things:

The following taken from Michael Eaton:

*“pondered:” this literally means, “weighed.” And is a rarely used word. It points to careful evaluation, indicating his honesty, caution, and balance.

*“searched out:” this refers to his thoroughness and diligence

Set in order:” (arranged) points to the skillful orderliness of his presentation and reminds us that there is an artistic element in his work

This book wasn’t just thrown together nor is any other part of Scripture just thrown together. As you read through it you can see it building to this conclusion. This speaks to the value of reading the books of the Bible through in a single sitting before and after you break it down into smaller sections.

Ecclesiastes 12:10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

Solomon wanted to find just the “right words” (other translations: “acceptable,” “pleasing”) as he wrote. What he wrote was also “upright and true.” Solomon did not sacrifice the truth to please others.

This reminds me that all of Scripture is truth. God gave Solomon the words that he wrote to make eternal differences in the lives of those who read and study them. Those who wrote what we have in our Bible gave much thought as they wrote and were guided by God.

2 Timothy 3:15–17 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17** so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19–21 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. **20** Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. **21** For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

What Solomon wrote was true. To pursue all those things he mentions throughout the book apart from God is utterly meaningless. They are all very temporary and empty of meaning without God.

Not only is God’s Word Truth;

GOD’S WORD IS UNIQUE

v. 11-12

Ecclesiastes 12:11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.

Think about how the following descriptions fit the Word of God.

The words of the wise are like “goads:” this is one of the tools that would be used by a shepherd. It was a sharp stick used to keep a stubborn animal moving. It isn’t meant to injure the animal but to just keep it moving.

These words, in this book, are meant to keep us moving forward in our walk with God. We get so easily distracted and Solomon mentions many of those distractions. We can easily make them into idols. You may protest but I speak from my own personal experience. It brings to mind the last stanza of the hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” which was written in the early 1800’s.

O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be!
Let thy goodness like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee;
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above.

These words are ‘sayings like firmly embedded nails:’ they are meant to speak to our heart and cause us to remember them. God’s Word has a way of sticking in our mind. Think of some of the sayings in Ecclesiastes:

“two are better than one” (4:9)

“a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (4:12)

“The race is not to the swift, nor battle to the strong” (9:11)

This points me to the truth found in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The word of God is also unique in that it is “*given by one shepherd.*” God is referred to here as “*shepherd,*” and earlier as “*our Creator.*” These are words describing both the greatness and closeness of God. He is the One who has given us these words. These are not words just given by Solomon, or David, or Moses, or Paul, John, Matthew Mark, Luke, Peter and so on. The Bible has endured because it is the Word of God!! Many have tried to stamp it out and have predicted its demise. They have spoken of how it is irrelevant today and yet it remains. There is no other book like it!!

1 Peter 1:23–25 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. **24** For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, **25** but the word of the Lord stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

Ecclesiastes 12:12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body.

Solomon warns that there continues to be the making (writing) of many books. There is no lack of books today. More than one million books are published every year!! Yet, none compare to this book, the Bible. Solomon isn’t saying that we can’t read other books. If you walk into my office, you will find lots of books and I have even more books on my computer and many on my kindle. The point Solomon is making is not to lose the importance of God’s Words. We can get consumed with reading books about the Word of God to the neglect or downplaying of reading the BOOK!!! When I begin working on a sermon I spend time reading God’s Word first and asking God to teach me before I look at any commentary. God has given every believer the Holy Spirit to help us understand His Words!!

God’s Word is truth, God’s Word is Unique and:

GOD’S WORD IS LIFE-CHANGING v. 13

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.

Solomon is going to give us his conclusion: “fear God and keep His commandments”

“*fear God:*” What does this phrase mean? This is a theme that Solomon has mentioned earlier in this book. It is to recognize God as who He is. He is Creator, He is Almighty, He alone is worthy of our worship. It means to honor Him, to be in awe of Him, and it demands a response. He changes our lives.

Fearing God is tied to “*keeping His commandments.*” Worship and obedience are tied together in Scripture.

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

The interesting part about this is that you and I cannot possibly do this without God. Not only is life meaningless apart from God but it is also impossible! Solomon is not saying that anyone gains God’s approvable and forgiveness through their own efforts. When someone knows the Shepherd personally their life is changed.

Solomon says that fearing God and keeping His commandments is “*the whole duty of man.*”

Philip Graham Ryken, “This is all there is to man,” or “this is what life is all about.”

Apart from knowing God there is no reason, motivation, or power to obey God. But, when someone truly comes to know the Lord He changes their life. It’s more than just believing some facts about God. Yes, we need to know those facts:

*we are sinners

*we are under God’s righteous judgment

- *Jesus Christ died and rose again for our sins
- *I need to repent of (turn from) my sin
- *I must believe

I am not saying this to make anyone doubt their salvation. It is all a work of grace, not due to anything we have done or can do. Solomon reminds us that it is life-changing!!

The greatest thing we can do is know God, worship Him, and live in obedience to Him!

God's Word is truth, God's Word is unique, God's Word is life-changing and:

GOD'S WORD IS A WARNING v. 14

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

After sin entered the world man began playing the game of hiding from God. Solomon tells us that everything will be revealed and out in the open when we face God.

Philip Graham Ryken, "If there is a God who will judge the world, then everything matters. This is not all there is. There is a God in heaven who rules the world. There is a life to come after this life. One day the dead will be raised and every person who has ever lived will stand before God for judgment. When that day comes, it will be revealed that everything anyone ever did or said or thought has eternal significance."

Jesus talked way more about hell than heaven. Let the book of Ecclesiastes be a warning! There are eternal consequences in the balance.

Both the believer and unbeliever will face judgment. The judgment of the unbeliever is referred to as the "Great White Throne Judgment." We read about this in the book of Revelation. It is for those who do not have their names written in the "Lamb's Book of Life."

Revelation 20:11–15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. **13** The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. **14** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. **15** If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Hell is forever!!!

The believer will come before the judgment seat of Christ. I mentioned this last week. We will not be judged for our sin but for what we have done for the Lord.

1 Corinthians 3:10–15 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. **11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, **13** his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. **14** If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. **15** If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

It matters that we live for Jesus. Throughout Scripture we are given warnings. For the person who has come to faith in Jesus, serving God is a response of love, worship, and honor. It is a privilege to come alongside what God is doing.

SO WHAT???

Many who read Ecclesiastes look at this book as a real downer and find nothing to be encouraged by. I find it as a very encouraging book because not only did Solomon not find meaning and purpose in pursuing things apart from God, he also found that God gives true meaning and purpose to everything for those who pursue Him first. Here are the encouraging things that I glean from this book.

*I have pursued things apart from God and made them idols. I have failed to keep God's commands and I need a Savior.

*God is my Creator and Shepherd, the One who alone gives meaning and purpose to everything in life.

*Only when I trust God fully and am satisfied in Him alone can I truly enjoy life. This is unrelated to my circumstances of life.

*Only God can provide the way to have my relationship with Him restored which He did through sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and raise again for my sins.

*God has given me His word, the Bible, which is truth, unique, life-changing, and a warning.

So, what am I going to do with God and His Word? If you are “chasing the wind” please stop. You will never regret pursuing God. As you do He will be found.