

Seeking Meaning in this life, Ecclesiastes 2 November 2, 2008 - Skip MacMillan

Ecclesiastes takes you on a journey through life, to the far reaches of money, power, success, pleasure and wisdom.

He is searching for meaning in every thing known to man.

Reading Ecclesiastes gets you to think about life and challenges you to rethink your pursuits and meaning.

Tone: sober, melancholy, depressing, dark

Ecclesiastes (Greek) = *Qohelet* (Hebrew) = Preacher / Teacher (English)

Hevel = senseless, absurd, meaningless, vapor of vapors

Disturbing observations about life

Designed to sympathize, challenge and evangelize the skeptic

Designed to "wake up the Church"

Chapter one gives an overview of the meaninglessness of life.

What is your answer to the meaninglessness?

Frustrated some, we want the good ending.

Inspired others, understanding we must walk into the darkest pit of man without God to begin appreciating God.

Qohelet, "I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives" (Ecc. 2:3).

Meaning in Pleasure and Projects? Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Pleasure:

"I thought in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.' "

"I refused my heart no pleasure" (Ecc. 2:10).

Laughter, wine, folly and projects; "that also proved to be meaningless".

Projects:

Built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens, parks, and planted all kinds of trees, bought slaves, owned herds and flocks, amassed silver and gold for myself, treasure of kings and provinces, acquired singers and harems.

1 Kings 4:20-26; 10:14-11:3

"I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me" (Ecc. 2:9).

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure" (Ecc. 2:10).

"I" used 17 times in verses 1-11, points to the motive and center of his life.

You and Me, parallel microcosm

Do we find ourselves seeking these very things?

Our microcosm: homes, landscaping, gardens, planting trees, hire people to do work in our yards and homes, buy a dog, amass stocks and investments, buy elaborate TV and audio systems.

I am better off than my parents before me, maybe even all my brothers and sisters.

I deny myself nothing that is within my reach, or my credit score, sacrificing very little.

All this and are we feeling any meaning yet?

The Ridge

The Ridge is a tall mountain,
We cannot see over it so we idealize and dream of what life must be like over there.
We spend our lives working tirelessly to climb the ridge, making tremendous sacrifices, taking risks, staying committed and disciplining ourselves.

The Ridge is different for each person in the details but the same.
Are there things we pursue in life that we believe will bring meaning and contentment?
Are there things we are living for in this life: a good job, a good husband, or just "more"?
Are there things you don't have today but are striving to get one day?
It is what we have been told and now believe will bring contentment and meaning.

In a strange kind of way the ridge keeps us hoping, striving, toiling and keeps us all very busy.

The truth about the Ridge is that most of us will never reach the summit.
But that doesn't stop us; we keep climbing, sweating, and sacrificing.
In doing so, the ridge keeps us from having to sit in the reality of this life, that it is utterly meaningless.

Solomon climbed this ridge, stood on top and was able to look all over, even on the other side.

As he did, he was confronted with the illusion the Ridge presented; he saw it for what it was: all the pleasures and projects were in the end ultimately meaningless.

"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" (Ecc. 2:11).

Solomon, the one renowned by the world, even today 3000 years later, the king of Israel in its most glorious state, ruler of a world empire, vast armies, wives in the hundreds, explored other countries, built palaces and the very Temple of God, conquered nations, had success after success and yet struggled to find meaning. All this and still nothing.

Once the dust settled and the projects were complete, the night of entertainment ended, the degree obtained, the job landed, he looked around and found himself wanting.

Solomon climbed the ridge, stood on top, looked around and came face to face with the emptiness, disappointment and meaninglessness of it all, ***and then he looked back and saw all the millions of people trying to climb up the same ridge.***

The Ridge represents all the stuff we seek and demand meaning from but which does not and cannot offer it.

What are you chasing after, what are you thinking you will find on the other side of the ridge?

Meaning in Wisdom? Eccl. 2:12-16

1 Kings 4:29-34

"I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom and also madness and folly" (Ecc. 2:12).
Turning inward to the intellect and philosophy.

1. "I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness" (Ecc. 2:13). He saw the value in wisdom, it gives quality of life and yet it also has limitations.
2. "... but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both" (Ecc. 2:14).
3. "What then do I gain by being wise?" (Ecc. 2:15).

4. "The wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!" (Ecc. 2:16).

He was straining to see the value and meaning in being wise.

Wisdom does add to the quality of life (preserves life, brings strength, joy, better than brute strength) but wisdom has its limitations.

Wisdom without purpose while better than folly is still ultimately meaningless; "like the fool, the wise man too must die!"

"So I hated life" Eccl. 2:17-23

Why?

"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. . . he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it . . . All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest" (Ecc. 2:18-19, 21, 23).

He understood that all he strained for and lost sleep over was one generation away from being lost.

1. Solomon's prophetic vision of what was to come:

Israel's future, 722 BC the ten northern tribes wiped off the map; 586 BC the remaining two tribes were deported to Babylon and all was lost. 250 to 350 years and all that he has built, strained and sacrificed for will be completely destroyed.

With all his control, power, ability, he could not control the future.

The depressed see life more clearly, without all the pretense, seeing the futility of life.

2. What did David, his father, pass on to him?

What did Solomon the father of many sons, pass on to them?

He never says he poured time and energy into his children, those he would have to hand things over to.

What are we passing on to our children?

For us it is the same, we have children, but we don't slow down with work, we keep pressing on, seeking more and more gain, sidelining our children and then wonder why they are a helion at 16, why they aren't responsible, why they don't respect me, why they don't listen.

Maybe our focus has been so intense on climbing the ridge we forgot about them. Maybe we should invest more in the child than the stuff we will hand to them.

What is your answer to our meaninglessness?

A first step toward God, Eccl. 2:24-26

Solomon agrees with the skeptic that pleasure, projects and even wisdom are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

But then, he takes a first step toward God.

1st "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" (Ecc. 2:24).

God is the giver of satisfaction, food and drink;

"every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

2nd "... for without him (God), who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to someone else who pleases God" (Ecc. 2:25-26).

It is impossible to find meaning without God.
God is necessary for meaning in this life.

Eccl. 2: 1-23 is what man can accomplish and discover.
Eccl. 2:24-26 moves beyond man to a sovereign God.

We all want and desire meaning but all our projects, pleasure and wisdom cannot produce it.

God is the one who provides fundamental meaning to our daily routines.

**What is your answer to our meaninglessness? More pleasure, projects, wisdom?
What we are seeking to find on the ridge can only be given by Jesus Christ.**

Ask God if he is there to make himself known to you.

When He does then you have a decision to make and something to place your faith in.