

Living in a "Meaningless" World

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem:

^[2] "Meaningless, meaningless," says the Teacher; "totally meaningless, everything is meaningless."

^[3] What benefit do people gain, for all the hard work they do under the sun? ^[4] Their generation dies off and another generation replaces them. And the world just continues on.

^[5] The sun rises, and the sun sets. Then it goes back to the place where it rises again. ^[6] The wind blows one way, and then another. Round and round it goes, until it returns to where it came from - and starts over again. ^[7] All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea never completely fills. The waters return to where the rivers began, and there they flow again.

^[8] Everything is filled with weariness - far beyond what words can describe. Nothing you see and nothing you hear can fully satisfy anything.

^[9] What has been, will be again; and what has been done, will be done again - there is nothing new under the sun. ^[10] Is there anything of which it may be said, "Look, this is new"? No. It has already been here, for ages long past.

^[11] People of the past are forgotten. Those of the future will be forgotten by others who will come after them.

IS THIS ALL YOU ARE LIVING FOR?

You are born...

- replacing the generation that came before you...

And you live...

- only to face a world of constant repetition - an endless cycle...
- never able to get enough of anything to fully satisfy - you think you're almost there, and then you have to start over...
- filled with constant weariness, no lasting accomplishments, and nothing new to look forward to...

And then you die...

- only to be forgotten... just as you forgot those who came before you...

Is this all you are living for? What good is it?

DOESN'T GOD OFFER SOMETHING BETTER?

YES!

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we discover that *nothing* in this life has lasting meaning. If this "life under the sun" is all you live for, *then you are the ultimate loser!*

But we also learn that there *is* meaning, if we find our meaning in God. The ultimate conclusion of all this is found in **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**:

This is the final conclusion after all has been heard: Fear God, and do what he says - this is all that each of us must do. ^[14] For God will judge everything - even what we do in secret - whether it be good or evil.

If this is what you live for, *then your life will have meaning, both now and forever!*

GO FOR THE LIFE THAT HAS MEANING!

The message of Ecclesiastes is the same as what Jesus taught. **"What advantage is it, for a person to gain the whole world, and then lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36)** Ultimately, we must look *beyond* this world "under the sun," to the values of God's kingdom. When God's kingdom becomes our focus, and God's Word becomes our foundation - in other words, when we become genuine followers of Jesus - everything in life takes on a new meaning. We can do the activities of this present life, but we will do them with a different purpose - for there is a Day of Justice, and a new heaven and new earth to look forward to. As Jesus' followers, we know that the things we do now, in this "meaningless" world, will result in value and meaning that will remain - long past the time this "meaningless" world has crumbled into the dust!

"He who dies with the most toys... DIES; but he who dies with Christ... LIVES!"

Background Issues (for the whole book of Ecclesiastes)

About the book: It's part of the "wisdom" section of the Bible

- Since it is a book of wisdom, why do so many people *not* accept what it says? (Most people think the book is "cynical," or an expression of "man's wisdom"!)

About the human author: Most likely King Solomon

- Who was King Solomon? Why would he be qualified to write the book of Ecclesiastes (1 Kings 3:5-15)? [Note: Since Solomon's name is not expressly mentioned in the book, some people choose to leave the question of authorship unanswered.]
- Whatever our conclusion regarding the human author, the ultimate author is God - and this is why the book is worth our attention.

The importance of context

- Context is *very* important. If you tear a paragraph (or even a single verse out of its context, you may reach false conclusions.
- "*What gives us lasting meaning? What is worth living for?*" This is the question, the focus of Ecclesiastes. When we read a passage that tells us something is "meaningless," it is within the context of this question that we must understand what it is saying. The thing being described may have value, but not as something that gives *ultimate meaning* to our lives.

Issues to Think About (in Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)

What does this passage mean by "meaningless"?

- What things can you do, which will have (or give you) lasting meaning, significance or value? Reflect on the difference between the following:
 - Meaning or value that is *short-lived/temporary*
 - Meaning or value that is *lasting/permanent*In the long run, only what *lasts* will have *lasting* meaning!
- When you die, what do you think people will write in your obituary? Even if they write only *good* things about you, will it matter, in the long run? (Will anyone care, a hundred years from now?)
 - If a nice-sounding obituary is all that you are living for, what good is it? (Little or none, in the long run!)
 - In contrast, what if you change your focus to things *beyond* the point of death - to the Day of Justice and beyond - what good is it? (Quite a lot!)

What does this passage mean by "nothing new"?

- If we have difficulty with this concept of "nothing new," perhaps the issue has to do with the way we are defining that phrase. Think about the following:
 - 1) Could this "nothing new" be referring to "new" inventions or products people make? (Not very likely!)
 - People have always been inventing and making things. The human author would have been smart enough to know it, so he wouldn't have been referring to that!
 - Even though this is probably *not* what the author was referring to, there *is* a sense in which we could say that new inventions are *not* new. After all, in many respects, they are nothing more than *new* ways to do the same types of *old* things as have been done since the beginning of time! Although the techniques may change, what they are trying to accomplish doesn't. (For example, cars are just another form of transportation; computers are just another form of communication; etc.)
 - 2) Could this "nothing new" be referring to world conditions, conflicts between right and wrong, human nature, the types of things people live for, values, etc.? (This view is much more realistic.)
- Since God is the ultimate author, we should let the book of Ecclesiastes itself, *define* what it means by "nothing new." The very issues mentioned in the book will show us what is meant!