

Knowledge without Christ is Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life (Ecclesiastes)

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Text: Ecclesiastes 1:9-18

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Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of Ecclesiastes. Tonight we continue in our series called “The Greener Grass Syndrome”. We are always looking for something better. The cycle never stops because we are never satisfied. Do you remember the solution to the greener grass syndrome? You don’t go looking for greener grass. There is not a “better” situation out there. You’ve got water your own grass with the water of a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ.

Last week we saw that “Life without Christ is Meaningless”. Tonight we are going to see that “Knowledge without Christ is Meaningless”.

Summary / review: Last week we saw that without anchoring our life to Jesus Christ, everything is vanity. The word “vanity” means meaningless. **Look at verse 2, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”**

Solomon says, “Everything is meaningless.”
Everything, Solomon? “Everything.”
What about marriage? “Meaningless.”
What about knowledge and wisdom? “Meaningless.”
What about pleasure? “Meaningless.”
What about wealth? “Meaningless.”
There is nothing that can satisfy us “under the sun” apart from God

In other words, Solomon tried everything under the sun, and while he found a temporary pleasure in all good things that God has given, yet there was always a ceiling. There is a certain limit to joy and meaning and purpose to all things in this life apart from God. But we were not created to live as animals for only those things under the sun on this earth. We were created to enjoy the pleasure of God which is beyond the sun. We need to live for the Son of God, not for that which is under the sun on this earth.

What we are going to find out in this series over and over again is that life without Christ is meaningless.

Now let me restate again what Solomon aims at in the end of chapter 1. It’s what we are all addicted to in our generation. So we are going to shoot it down tonight as meaningless.

What aspect of life are we going to talk about tonight that is meaning if it is obtained apart from God—apart from your walk with Him through Christ. What is it? Knowledge. Information. Wisdom. Philosophy. Knowledge of political systems. Sports

knowledge. Wikipedia is vain unless it is used to employ your understanding of this world for the glory of God.

Vain? Meaningless? Yes!

Our society seems to believe that if we can pour enough money into education, our children will be who they need to be. We need to listen to Solomon. Look at **Ecclesiastes 1:17** as our main text, and then we'll look at the whole passage, "I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit." Did you hear Solomon? I've experienced wisdom and knowledge, but it only vexed my spirit." Knowledge, information, wisdom apart from God will tickle your intellect for a while. But apart from God, it is vain!

Before we get to the text, let's pray. [Prayer for Guidance]

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Sometimes as Christians we think if we need more knowledge, more information, more books, more internet searches, we can find the answer.

- T. S. Eliot said, "All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance." That is exactly what Solomon says in **verse 18**, "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." As far as wisdom was concerned, the fuller that Solomon got, the emptier that he felt. It had not yielded the satisfaction he was looking for.
- Consider the sum total of all of our knowledge, which **doubles** every 2 ½ months. Consider all of the progress we have made technologically, medically, scientifically, economically, and militarily. Has it made life more rich, fulfilling or satisfying? Or are we more enslaved out of our minds? What good has all this information done us? Without God it is meaningless!
- Consider **Acts 4:13**, and tell me what really matters. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **unlearned and ignorant men**, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."
- It is said that John Bunyan's entire library consisted of the Bible and Foxe's Book of Martyrs. He had very little learning, but he had learned Christ (**Ephesians 4:21**).

Why do we go after knowledge? Solomon gives three reasons.

- I. We go after knowledge because **we want to Experience Life**. **Solomon says Life apart from Christ is a meaningless rut.** Life has little pizzazz outside of Christ, so we try to add pizzazz to the treadmill of life. Imagine a big sign hanging over **verses 9-11** that says, "welcome to the treadmill of life". New things are constantly

invented, yet there is really nothing new to the “Rat Race”. Solomon wants us to know that apart from meaning in Christ, every one on earth spanning every generation is in a predictable meaningless rut. People have been working themselves to death for no real purpose since the beginning of time at the Fall.

Look at **Ecclesiastes 1:9-11**, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. 10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after”.

1. **Explanation:** In every generation we have new inventions that will solve our problems. My father remembers when TV was invented. Some of you remember 8 track tapes. Wasn't that great? There's a new diet fad every other day. We get new technology or a new celebrity, a new movie or TV show. Last week they just came out with the iPad that is supposed to be the future of books. Whatever comes out next, it's really nothing new. It's just another distraction to make you forget that you are on the treadmill of life. Apart from God, your life is in a predictable, meaningless rut.
2. You say, well Solomon knew nothing of the internet, of VCRs or CD players. That's right—what he's referring to is the social and spiritual aspects of who we are. Mankind has not changed. ***Time has changed much, but it hasn't changed man himself.***
3. Human beings generation after generation do the same vain things in relation to God, the world, and one another. **Verse 10**, “Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.”

Sinners and struggling saints get caught up in the treadmill. We work ourselves to death without realizing that our purpose is to live “for the glory of God”.

4. How much meaning is there in all this new stuff? It's all going to be forgotten. Do you remember...
 - That before CDs we had vinyl records
 - Remember when VCRs were 500 of dollars? Some of our young people have hardly seen a VCR.
 - The rate at which we obtain stuff and get rid of it is amazing. Count all the garage sales on any given nice weather day. Better yet go to one. Better yet, have one! You'll see all the things you though you could live with out, but you have now forgotten.

Solomon says in **verse 11**, “There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after”.

Application: We see this play out in life over and over and over again, that a gadget or a new bit of clothes or a new house or a new boat or a new car, it brings this weird relief and excitement to life. Doesn't it? I mean it just does. Have you ever thought about how weird that is? That a **new cell phone**, the cool one, makes you feel better. It has an emotional effect on you. You get it and you just hold it. When you're around people, you pull it out to check the time just so they can see. I mean it's this really weird, "This validates the reason I'm here." And the Scriptures are going, "Give me a break." Trinkets are trinkets. What matters is God! "For me to live is Christ!"

Transition: We all come to a point as we mature in life where we see things don't satisfy, so many of us turn to knowledge to dull the pain.

II. We go after knowledge because **we want to Experiment with Life**. ***We have a morbid curiosity to know what's out there.*** As we go down the treadmill of life, there are many things to take our mind off the treadmill. It's like those fancy schmancy work out gyms that have TVs attached to the treadmills. People want to take their mind off the pain of stretching their body.

Explanation: Life hurts, and one of the ways we distract ourselves is through what I call "Information Overload". We live in an age that seeks after wisdom and knowledge and information in place of God. How many channels do we need on a television? The average person with a remote control will change channels 350,000 times in his lifetime.

We have 24 hour news cycles. You can turn on CNN and FOX and a thousand other channels on your TV or on the Internet and waste your life gaining meaningless knowledge.

We live in the information age where as I said the body of information that we have in the world **doubles every 2 ½ months**. Did you catch that?

Now you say, Solomon didn't have the Internet. No, but he did something far beyond what any of us have ever done as far as experimenting.

A. Solomon's **exploration** of life. Solomon didn't have Google or the internet, but he did have unlimited resources to seek out information. Check out **verse 12**, "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem 13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."

- The word "search out" means to investigate, explore, or experiment. So the king—wealthy, wise, powerful Solomon, set out to explore all that is done under heaven.

- He's got an experiment going. He's going to use the five senses: taste, touch, seeing, hearing and smell. So, he's going to use his five senses with all his wealth, power and wisdom, and he's going to use those five senses to apply those five senses to the seven favorite things among men.
- Here are the seven favorite things: wealth, power, religion, friends, work, knowledge, and pleasure.
- Solomon decides to explore everything. There was no one who was more curious than Solomon. In his day he was the ultimate knowledge surfer. If there was an internet, he'd not only surf it, he'd own it.

B. Solomon's **dissatisfaction** with life. **Verse 14**, "**I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit**". Solomon gained all the knowledge he could about everything. Instead of helping him, it hurt him. It brought him pain. He had that ache that he was wasting his life.

- Knowledge, if it not attached to Christ just makes us prouder, self-centered, unhappy people. "**Knowledge puffeth up**" (**1 Corinthians 8:1**). Knowledge is dangerous if it doesn't lead us to God. You've heard the saying, "curiosity killed the cat". That thirst for knowledge killed the cat.

C. Well, Curiosity Killed more than the Cat

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden and see how dangerous curiosity is. It is interesting that at the beginning Satan's temptation of Eve was for knowledge, specifically the "knowledge of good and evil". Like Eve, we all have a sinful desire for the curious. Curiosity not only killed the cat, it killed the entire human race.

Application: Let me give some practical warnings.

- Internet curiosity kills marriages. If you surf the internet with no goal in mind, but just "out of curiosity" let me tell you, you are a candidate for a terrible fall. You will sin, it's just a matter of time. We cannot test God. If you play with fire you will get burned.
- Some of you are curious about email. You have to check it every five minutes. That curiosity is really an ache for God.
- Some of you are curious about facebook. You can spend hours there.
- Others can text and use that cell phone God gave you. If you are spending inordinate amounts of time on this stuff, you are looking for satisfaction in a place that cannot fulfill you.

- Do you spend inordinate amounts of time texting, spending time on the computer, video games, or with your mp3 player? Life is about people, not technology.
- You are probably robbing your family of quality time if you are hooked on curiosity and knowledge. There is a solution to this problem.
- Turn your cell phone off at night when you are home. If you are home, people can get a hold of you through the old fashioned line based telephone. If you only have a cell phone, then have the spouse with the least called phone keep their phone on. If you have a cell phone biologically attached to your ear, then you need to turn off your phone at night and ask God to help you not to abuse it! This goes for any technology.
- The TV is the same way. Channel surfing will get you spiritually dirty. I don't know of a time when I just channel surfed with no objective but to be mindlessly entertained, and I got hit with something I didn't want to hear or see.

David said in **Psalm 101:3**, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me."

Questions

1. What do you really get from the news? What is your purpose?
2. Have you considered the dangers of internet use with no fences and no accountability?

III. We go after knowledge because **of our High Expectations** for life. We have high expectations to succeed. We want to divide and conquer. We want to do something significant. Perhaps we can't bring world peace, but we often have high idealistic goals. There's a problem though.

A. Many times our expectations are wrongly **focused**. Verse 15a, "**That which is crooked cannot be made straight:**

We often get idealistic expectations that distract and disappoint us. We want to believe that we can really make a difference.

- My brother is doing something really cool this year. He's biking across the country, from California to North Carolina for a young cancer patient. He wants to raise awareness and funds for a cure for forms of childhood cancer. That's a noble good thing.
- On May 22nd we are going to have a fundraiser Cystic Fibrosis in Naperville. We love to participate in "Great Strides" every year.
- These are all great things, but let's not fool ourselves. The greatest problem that our children face is not cancer and it is not cystic fibrosis.

The greatest enemy is SIN. Whether we find cures for these diseases, our children are going to spend their lives somewhere forever. They will either be judged by their behavior or by their trust in Christ.

- Unless we are involved in spreading the Gospel, what we do will not last ultimately.

Application: We cannot expect to straighten out that which is crooked (verse 15). That's not my job or your job. That's Jesus' job. So many people get involved in politics because they want to straighten everything out. **Verse 15**, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight"—only Jesus can make the hearts of men straight. Our government will not and cannot be straightened out until Jesus comes again.

Transition: So what is crooked cannot be straightened out, except by Jesus' grace. Our expectations are wrongly focused.

B. Our expectations are also **unrealistic**.

Verse 15b, "and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." The word "wanting" is pointing to those things we "long to attain".

- We have romantic thoughts about the greener grass. Things would be better, if only... The problem is all of the "if onlys" that do not and will never exist in people's minds are so many they cannot be numbered.
- So we might find out information about so many things in life dreaming about unrealistic things. And it's all a waste.

IV. Solomon's **conclusion**. **Verse 16**, "I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Solomon experience the high life of wisdom and the low life of folly and madness.

A. Knowing all that the **high life** offers without Christ is vain. What Solomon did was, he marbled everything and encrusted it in gold. He ate caviar; he went to the opera; he went golf clubs and the elite night clubs. He spent his wealth and power. He did all that the rich and famous do, and he found it to be meaningless. And so, after he had acquired all that stuff and had all those things and did all the things that the rich did, he decided to go the other direction.

B. Knowing all that the **simple life** offers without Christ is vain. So, then Solomon looked down and found some country folk and hung out with them to live the simple life. And drank he drank Diet Dr. Pepper and played horseshoes and went to the Sox games and ate macaroni and cheese and hamburger stirred up in a pot.

And he even hated on the Cubs a little bit, and after he did all that, he found out that this also was meaningless.

- C. Solomon even went a little stupid here with the **low life** and showed it was vain. He played with “madness and folly” (**verse 17**). He gave himself to the stupid stuff. He goes into this a little more in chapter 2, but he finds out everything he can about pleasure. He tries everything he can possibly try of this world’s pleasure.

So he’s tried both the high life, and the simple life, and even the low life. He’s got all the knowledge, he’s done all the experimentation with life that can be done. He’s surfed the information superhighway of his day. He’s watched Fox and CNN, done 10,000 texts, gotten every car, had every girl, thrown every party. He knows everything there is to know. And what is his conclusion? **Verse 18**, “For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

Conclusion: For some people, they think seeking after knowledge is the way to satisfy themselves. Solomon tried to educate his way to satisfaction! He thought if he could learn enough . . . if he could earn enough degrees that he would experience fulfillment! But the more he learned the less he knew and the less he liked what he learned!

Now, I’m all for education! I believe you ought to get all the education available! But I want to tell you that education without God is just brilliant foolishness. A person who has knowledge in his head but doesn’t have God in his heart, is nothing more than a clever devil! Information, knowledge and learning is all meaningless without Christ.