

A. INTRODUCTION

1. For Several Reasons - I Prefer To Preach Series of Sermons Through a Given Book of the Bible
 - a. Series - I believe - is the better way to learn
 - 1) About the Bible in general
 - 2) About a book of the Bible in specific
 - 3) About any given doctrine in a holistic & integrated manner
 - b. Series - More sure way for me to be faithful & try to preach the whole counsel of God
 - 1) By preaching through books I can avoid - over-preaching pet doctrines & texts
 - 2) By preaching through books I can avoid - under-preaching unpopular texts or subjects
 - c. Series is reminder
 - 1) **2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,**
 - 2) **Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**
 - d. Beginning of any sermon Series is daunting
 - 1) Requires dedication AND discipline
 - 2) Holds many uncertainties AND certain interruptions
 - e. Today begin 2 series
 - 1) Mornings - **ECCLESIASTES**
 - 2) Evenings - **MATTHEW**
2. Text & Prayer. **ECCLESIASTES 1:1 & 12:9-12**
3. There Are
 - a. Dying Words
 - 1) Atheist Mr. Rich: - *“Terrible horrors hang over my soul! I have given my immortality for gold; and its weight sinks me into a hopeless, helpless Hell!”*
 - 2) Sir Francis Newport, the head of an English infidel club: - *“You need not tell me there is no God for I know there is one, and that I am in His presence! You need not tell me there is no hell. I feel myself already slipping. Wretches, cease your idle talk about there being hope for me! I know I am lost forever! Oh, that fire! Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell!”*
 - b. Suicide notes
 - 1) Actor George Sanders (April 25, 1972) - *“Dear World, I am leaving you because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool – good luck.”*
 - 2) Musician Kurt Cobain (April 5, 1994) - *“Thank you all from the pit of my burning, nauseous stomach for your letters and concern during the past years. I’m too much of an erratic, moody baby! I don’t have the passion anymore, and so remember, it’s better to burn out than to fade away”*

c. Words of hope & meaning in face of senseless brutality & unimaginable sufferings

Barracks 8 was in the quarantine compound. Next to us--perhaps as a deliberate warning to newcomers--were located the punishment barracks. From there, all day long and often into the night, came the sounds of hell itself. They were not the sounds of anger, or of any human emotion, but of a cruelty altogether detached: blows landing in regular rhythm, screams keeping pace. We would stand in our ten-deep ranks with our hands trembling at our sides, longing to jam them against our ears, to make the sounds stop.

"It grew harder and harder. Even within these four walls there was too much misery, too much seemingly pointless suffering. Every day something else failed to make sense, something else grew too heavy.

"But as the rest of the world grew stranger, one thing became increasingly clear. And that was the reason the two of us were here. Why others should suffer we were not shown. As for us, from morning until lights-out, whenever we were not in ranks for roll call, our Bible was the center of an ever-widening circle of health and hope.

"Like waifs clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about it, holding out our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the Word of God.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

"I would look about us as Betsie read, watching the light leap from face to face. More than conquerors . . . It was not a wish. It was a fact.

"We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute--poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not "we shall be." We are!

Excerpt from *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom

4. Such Different Words - Such Different World-Views

- a. Lotto winners - Movie Stars - Sports idols who "have it all" but sense the vanity of life & die in despair
- b. Missionary - imprisoned - cold, alone, hungry BUT from their cell is the sound of singing
- c. Why the difference?

*BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES ADDRESSES THESE DIFFERENCES
& GIVES THE NECESSARY REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE
IN A WORLD FILLED WITH VANITY.*

B. ABOUT THE BOOK

1. There Are 39 Books in The Old Testament
 - a. 5 Books of the LAW - Pentateuch. **Genesis-Deuteronomy**
 - b. 12 Books HISTORICAL. **Joshua-Esther**
 - c. 5 Books - POETICAL or Wisdom Literature. **Job - Song of Solomon**
 - d. 17 Books PROPHECY. **Isaiah - Malachi**

2. Proper Translation & Application of These Books Requires We Understand
 - a. Each & all of the 39 books of the OT are Inspired Word of God
 - b. Each book & section are different & are to be handled differently
 - 1) Prophecy is obviously rich in imagery. beasts & horns = kings & nations
 - 2) Historical narrative - tells story through people & events
 - ▶ Does not always judge actions or define doctrine
 - ▶ As much as records the event
 - c. Wisdom books are by intent - POETICAL - PITHY & PONDEROUS. Proverbs
 - 1) The call upon us to LISTEN, LOOK, THINK, REFLECT
 - 2) They are not so much promises as insights - principles
 - d. **Consider Ps 37:25**
 - 1) Is David saying if you are righteous - you will not starve or beg bread?
 - ▶ What about David's great-grandmother - Ruth - famine caused Naomi to leave Bethlehem - news of food caused Naomi to return to Bethlehem
 - ▶ What about when Ben-hadad sieged Samaria >> cannibalism - any saved in Samaria
 - 2) In the course of earth's history millions have died of starvation
 - ▶ Includes 15 million children die of hunger every year
 - ▶ Includes missionaries who have given their lives for the Gospel
 - 3) When I think about missionaries I think about

Hebrews 11:35–38 - Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

4) No doubt somewhere today in a prison cell - is a believer who is lonely, cold, hurt & hungry

3. A Difficulty One Faces in Ecclesiastes Is the Fact That An *“act-consequence pattern is not evident in every aspect of life.”*
 - a. For example the Preacher addresses the vanity of
 - 1) Wisdom - wisdom brings grief. **1:12-15**
 - 2) Living wisely - end same as fool. **2:12-17**
 - 3) Toil (labor) - leave it all behind. **2:18-19**
 - b. As in book of Job - a wise and righteous man whose wise acts lead not to blessing but disaster of the worst sort.

C. THE PREACHER & HIS BOOK

1. The Author of Ecclesiastes is Defined as “*The Preacher*”

- a. From Hebrew (קֹהֵלֶת) qôheleth (*Ko-helleth*)
 - 1) *Collector of sayings - one who addresses the assembly*
 - 2) Synonyms include - *The Speaker - The Spokesman - The Philosopher - The Professor*
- b. Seven references to *Preacher* in Ecclesiastes
 - 1) 3 in opening of book (**1:1 ,2, 12**)
 - 2) 1 in middle of book (**7:27**)
 - 3) 3 at close of book (**12:8 , 9, 10**)

2. Concerning the Book..... **SEE 12:9-11**

- a. Verses describe PURPOSE OF THE BOOK. . . . deliberately, memorably, carefully teach wisdom
- b. Verses describe DELIBERATION OF THE AUTHOR..... was a *WORDSMITH*
 - 1) weighed, studied, arranged with care
 - 2) sought words of delight
 - 3) understood the power of words - - like goads & nails
- c. Verses describe ORIGIN OF THE BOOK - “*One Shepherd*”..... inspired word of God

3. Structure & Key Words-Phrases

- a. Structure of Ecclesiastes - Stuart Olyott notes
 - 1) **vs 1-11** - brief introduction..... from human standpoint - ALL is vanity
 - 2) **1:12-12:7** - main body of the book which consist of 4 sermons
 - 3) **12:8-14** - Conclusion - summary of what has gone before
- b. In Ecclesiastes - Life presented from two viewpoints
 - 1) J. A. Motyer notes- The Preacher puts himself & us “*in the shoes of a humanist or secularist*”
 - 2) Gordon Keddie writes - “*The writer [viz., Ecc], “questions, even ridicules, the status quo with merciless verve (vigor)” (12)*
 - 3) Motyer - “*His probing is so relentless that he can easily be taken fore a skeptic or a pessimist” (13)*
- c. Key words & phrases
 - 1) “**Vanity**” - encounter word dozens of times
 - ▶ Modern language means. *sense of empty pride*
 - ▶ Word Preacher uses means..... “*without substance, which quickly passes away*”
 - 2) “**Under the sun**” *an earth-bound & temporal perspective*
 - 3) Other key words - God - Heart - Wisdom (wise, wisely)

D. CONCLUSION

1. Despair - Been Called the "*CANCER OF THE SOUL*"
 - a. A life without real purpose is a life that is practically over
 - b. A life lived without purpose is pointless - drudgery - boredom - frustrating -
 - 1) A life without purpose is intellectually crippling & spirit damning
 - 2) It is to take from God hand - goodness & blessings & waste them
 - c. Most people have purpose - - Get rich, Be happy, Reach retirement, Raise my family
 - 1) Many of these purposes seem laudable
 - 2) Without God they are as empty as a life without purpose.
 - 3) An ink pen is a wonderful tool - FOR WRITING - not for cutting lumber or brain surgery

 - 4) If you tried to use a pen for a screw - you would be consider stupid and such attempts would be futile - vanity
 - d. Many people are unhappy, restless, actually living in despair BECAUSE they are not living for the purpose for which they exist

2. What is the Meaning of Life?
 - a. The Book of Ecclesiastes is bookend with the answer
 - 1) **1:2** - Negative - a life apart from God is vanity - be it a life filled with wisdom - hedonism (pleasure), living wisely, vocational accomplishments, riches & honors, a life apart from God is wasted - empty - pointless
 - 2) **12:13-14** - Positive - the true meaning of life - joy - purpose . . . is found in living a life directed by an awareness of God & obedience unto His commandments
 - b. Without Christ your life is vain - "*without substance, which quickly passes away*"
 - c. In Christ life is meaningful - Will you live a vain life or one with meaning?