

CHASING THE WIND
“Ready, Set, Go” Ecclesiastes 1:1-11
February 26, 2023

INTRO.: I want to welcome you to our new series, *Chasing the Wind*, from Ecclesiastes, a book in the Bible. Many people view this book as very depressing but I see it as a book filled with hope. I titled this first message, *Ready, Set, Go* because when I think of chasing I am reminded of track and field, a high school sport that begins the first Monday in March. Relays are some of my favorite events. Each team has 4 people in the relay. The first runner has a baton like this one that he/she must pass on to the next runner on the team in a designated area called the exchange zone. I have three words here (ready, set, go) because there are three commands given by the official starter. It goes like this: runners on your mark, set, and the gun goes off signifying the beginning of the race. When the second, third, or fourth runner receives the baton they are either chasing the team ahead or are being chased. If you are behind, you are chasing a real person. Can you imagine trying to *chase the wind*? This is one of the phrases the author of Ecclesiastes employs many times. It reminds me of cotton candy. You get this great treat on this stick and you take a bite and what happens? It disappears!! The writer of Ecclesiastes states that this is what life is like apart from God. So, today we are off and running, as we start our journey through this book. Just as any other book in the Bible, there are great truths that will be revealed, truths that can change our lives. Will you pray that God will teach us and we will not be the same because of what is in this book? This morning we are going to look at four things from Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. We will begin with a little background, and three main thoughts from these first 11 verses: **EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS, UNDER THE SUN, AND SAME OLD, SAME OLD.**

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

Background: (taken from Philip Graham Ryken) v. 1

Author: “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.”

“teacher:” could also be translated preacher, philosopher, or spokesman. The Hebrew root of the word means “to gather, collect, or assemble.” It refers to a gathering or assembly of a community of people, especially for the worship of God. This is sort of like a pastor in a church. The word *Ecclesiastes* is actually the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for teacher. Literally it means, “one who speaks in the assembly or congregation. It is very similar to the Greek word, *ekklhsia*, the word used for church (called out assembly) in the New Testament.

“son of David, king in Jerusalem:” This description would fit Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. If this were the case it would have been written in the 10th century BC. There is some debate as to the author, but it seems that Solomon fits the description best. If it is Solomon, it was probably written in the latter part of his life, as he came to realize that all he was chasing was empty without God.

Book: It is part of what is called *wisdom literature*. The questions addressed in this book are the same questions that are being asked by many today. This book teaches about God and about human beings and, in particular, what happens when human beings attempt to live life without God.

Solomon starts this book off with a bang (sorry for the pun).

EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS v. 2

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

“meaningless:” (Hebrew word “hebel”) In the NKJV and ESV the word is “*vanity*.” It can mean vapor, breath, like a puff of smoke coming from a fire or your breath on a cold winter morning.

Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this verse, "Smoke, nothing but smoke. There's nothing to anything – it's all smoke."

It can carry the idea of things that are *pointless*. In order to show people what really matters he is showing what doesn't matter, those things that are transient, that don't last for eternity. The word is repeated 5 times in this verse.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NKJV) "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

"vanity of vanities:" a construction that conveys intensity and superlative (Iain Provan)

This idea is so important that the word is repeated over 30 times in 12 chapters.

Our lives are like this according to Scripture. Let's look at some other verses that use the same root word.

Psalm 39:5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath (*hebel*). Selah

Psalm 39:6 Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain (*hebel*); he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

Psalm 39:11 You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth— each man is but a breath (*hebel*). Selah

Psalm 144:4 Man is like a breath (*hebel*); his days are like a fleeting shadow.

Proverbs 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting (*hebel*); but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

There are some comparable principles shared by New Testament authors.

James 4:14–16 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. **15** Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." **16** As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

Matthew 6:19–21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Solomon shares the bad news before he shares the good news. If the priorities in your life are things, money, fame, power, sex, achievement (and the list could go on) you need to understand those things are going to last. They're like cotton candy!!

UNDER THE SUN

v. 3

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

"gain:" this word is only in Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. It comes from the verb meaning, "to remain over, to be left over." This describes the person whose approach to life is like a consumer, what can I get out of it, where is my profit.

"under the sun:" relates to the here and now without God. It is also synonymous with the phrases in this book, *"under heaven"* and *"on earth."* It is used almost 30 times in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1:13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done **under heaven**. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is something else meaningless that occurs **on earth**: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

This reminds us of what Jesus says to the disciples in the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 16:24–26 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. **26** What good will it be for a man if he **gains** the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

This is describing a person who is only looking at what he can see with his physical eyes and is pursuing those things. It is looking at life from just a human perspective without looking to God for meaning and purpose. There is a hollowness to a life without God which we are reminded of throughout this book.

In Ecclesiastes 3 there is a whole list of things: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot and so on. Part of the conclusion of that section is that God has set eternity in the hearts of mankind. If that is true, and I believe it is, than to pursue life without God will be an empty experience.

The case is being built: Apart from God: life is meaningless (a vapor, a breath, a puff of smoke); there is nothing to be gained of lasting value if all we pursue is the here and now, what our eyes can see. This brings us to our third major reason that shows life without God is futile.

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

v. 4-11

He starts with nature to remind us of how fleeting and short life truly is for every one of us. We see the following four illustrations:

Verse 4: *Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.*

How many people have come and gone, and the earth is still here. Some day there will be a new heaven and a new earth created by God. For now, the earth reminds us of our mortality.

Verse 5: *The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.*

We have had some spectacular sunrises and sunsets over the past several months. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. It has to do with the earth’s rotation on its axis. That is the way God created the earth. You can count on it! People build their houses with this in mind for heating or cooling purposes.

Verse 6: *The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.*

The wind is more dependable than you or me.

Verse 7: *All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.*

With all the streams that flow into the sea, one would think that the sea would eventually become full. Where the streams come from, they will go back.

Then, we have the response of man to all of this in verse 8.

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

We can only accept life and death; we can’t change it. Medicine has done much to help prolong life but unless the Lord returns, we will die.

In fact: **Ecclesiastes 1:9** *What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 1:10 *Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.*

What does he mean by the phrase, “*nothing new under the sun?*” He can’t be referring to inventions or innovations man has made over the years. The basic events of life have never changed: birth, marriage, work, death and people still chase those things that don’t last: fame, power, wealth, success, happiness. This is not to say that all those things are bad, but without God in it they are truly empty.

If you think this is bad, here is his concluding introductory thought: *There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.* **Ecclesiastes 1:11**

You and I will only be remembered for so long. Even those who have yet to come will be forgotten by those who come after them.

Life is fleeting, so what are you and I chasing?

NFL Star Reflects on Near-Death Injury (picture of a football)

Ricardo Lockette rose up the ranks of pro football and eventually helped the Seattle Seahawks win the Super Bowl in 2014. But on November 1, 2015, the wide receiver and special teams player, was blindsided with a vicious hit and was left sprawled on the ground in front of 90,000 fans. A year after the hit that nearly broke his neck and took his life, Lockette reflected:

It's crazy what matters to you when you're in that situation. Cars, jewelry, big houses, Super Bowls? It all seems so meaningless. I came up from nothing. Undrafted, practice squad, released a bunch of times, then I made it to three Super Bowls in a row. I have a saying, kind of like a mantra, "A hundred dollars and a dream." I used to want a black Lamborghini and a seven-room house. That's what I dreamed about. Now, all of a sudden, I can't move. And the only thing that mattered to me in the entire world was being able to see my family again, to hold my kids in my arms.

After surgery to repair my damaged vertebrae and a few weeks of serious rehabilitation, I was walking around just fine and we were playing basketball again. But a few months later, in early May, I made the decision to retire from football at age 29. [My head coach Pete] Carroll used to preach to us all the time: "You live in a temporary fairy tale." Your fans are temporary. Your coaches are temporary. Your teammates, as much as they love you, are temporary. The big houses you live in are temporary. You can enjoy all that stuff, but it's not what will bring you happiness.

When I was laying motionless on that turf in Dallas, I was completely dependent upon the help of others. It was the exact opposite of the mindset I had from the moment I got to Seahawks camp as a rookie: You're a rock star. You're a leader. You're the alpha. This is all yours for the taking. Then, in one second, you're helpless.

Source: Adapted from Ricardo Lockette, "Am I About to Die?" The Player's Tribune (7-5-16)

SO WHAT???

Many look at these first eleven verses as a real downer but I see just the opposite. Man and woman are the capstone of God's creation. It wasn't until they were created that God looked at all He had made, and stated, it was very good. Mankind is the only created being to have been created in the image of God. As part of that capstone, he created us for relationship with Him and each other. Sin messed that all up and life became about us, with God being put on the periphery. The conclusion of these verses is that life without God is meaningless. It is a dead-end road.

Have you come to that place in your life where you recognize life without God is pointless? This book teaches great truths about God, the One who wants to have a relationship with you and me. If you've never started that relationship, what are you waiting for?

Life without God is Wasted

One night Canon Hay Aitken preached to a large audience in Bristol, England, on the text, "You must be born again." There in the congregation was a brilliant young man named Horatio Bottomly. He listened intently. He heard the preacher at the end of the sermon call all who were there to trust in the grace of Christ and to commit their lives to Jesus Christ, and he knew the call was addressed to him, too. He was deeply moved, but he said, "Not now, I'll run my own life." And he did.

He made a fortune and a name for himself as the champion of the people's rights. He was a lawyer; he exposed swindlers and prosecuted criminals with great vigor. When Bottomly was 63 years of age, this one who had exposed the crimes of others was himself convicted of a crime and sentenced to seven years in prison.

While he was there, another man visited him and asked to pray with him. Bottomly said that would be fine, and in the course of the conversation, the other man told his story. He said, "Yes, many years ago, I was in Bristol, and I heard a preacher, Canon Hay Aitken, preach on the text: You must be born again. I was so deeply moved that I committed my life to Christ, and ever since then, Christ has been my all in all."

Bottomly was silent for some time, and then he said, "I, too, heard that searching message. I, too, was deeply moved. I knew my need of Christ, but I rejected him." And then he said remorsefully, "A life without God is a wasted life."

Source: "Now is the Time," Preaching Today, Tape No. 73.

*Don't do life without God

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

I also realize that those who have a relationship with God sometimes begin chasing things that don't matter and put God in the rearview mirror. Maybe you need to go back to having God at the center of your life. Stop chasing the wind!! Read His Word, pray, get involved in a small group.