

DECONSTRUCTING LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Part 5 - Deconstructing Certainty

INTRO

- Do you have any favorite movies, books, TV shows, etc., about the future of humanity? What do you like about them?

READ

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16 & 7:23-24

Ecclesiastes is not only the Teacher's journey to find meaning in life but also to find the kind of wisdom that can guarantee success in life. Throughout the book, the Teacher realizes that the promises of such wisdom were empty and that life will always be lived in great uncertainty. True wisdom will be very different than what he expects.

It's important to remember that throughout the book, the Teacher tries to limit himself only to the things he observes "under the sun", which is an expression for all that is only earthly. And his method is also limited to only what he can observe on his own. He wants to trust only his own senses.

REFLECT

1. Our misplaced trust in certainty

Like the Teacher himself, we also like to act only when we are certain. And whatever promises to give us certainty is very attractive to us. Even good things like science and technology too easily become idols as they promise us certain knowledge and complete control over every sphere of life. It is easy to become obsessed with the latest and greatest advancements as if they were our only hope to make our lives better.

Many of us, like the Teacher, come to realize that even with all modern advancements, we still live in the midst of great uncertainty, and oftentimes the control we feel that we have over our lives is nothing more than an illusion.

Qu: Are there limits to what we can know by science? Is there anything that technology will never be able to do for us? Discuss.

2. Where is true wisdom to be found

Throughout his disappointment with his own method of investigation, the Teacher realizes the truth is that we will never live in certainty after all. Not only did his method fail, but every method would fail just the same. But then, how can we live well and wisely in such a mysterious world?

The Teacher conclusion is, that true wisdom begins with trusting the one who is trustworthy. It begins with the "fear of the Lord", as the book of Proverbs teaches us. It is by trusting the goodness and the power of God to direct our lives and to have the world under control that we can begin to live wisely. All we need to ask ourselves is, what is God calling me to do next? He will see to it that all else that we need will be provided. We obey in faith, and in the process, he opens our eyes to understand the world better than ever.

Qu: How comfortable are you when living through very uncertain circumstances? Do you hate it, or do you thrive at such a times?

Qu: Is God calling you to trust him with something you can't let go for fear of what the future holds?

Qu: How can today's discussion be of encouragement to someone who is crippled by fear of the future?

RESPOND & PRAY

- What encouraged/challenged you the most from this discussion?
- Spend time praying for one another and those you know who need to hear the good news of salvation.

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SIX KEY IDEAS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes can be difficult to interpret because it is so different from the other books in the Bible. Its unique style needs some explanation before we can begin making sense of it. We hope these six ideas will help you unlock many of the lessons we can learn from the book.

1 - Ecclesiastes is a speech by *Qohelet* (the Teacher) about the meaning of life.

The book has two “authors”. One is a speaker in an assembly (He is called *Qohelet* in the original Hebrew, usually translated as the Teacher or the Speaker). His purpose is to talk about how we can make sense of life’s meaning. The other author is an editor who wrote down the Teacher’s speech and also wrote a brief prologue (1:1) and an epilogue (12:9-14) to the book.

2 - The book is not an explanation, but an exploration of what gives life meaning.

Rather than just giving an answer to the question of life’s meaning, the Teacher goes on a journey to explore how we try to make sense of life. His journey is a winding road full of dead ends and it’s not before the book’s conclusion that we hear what he really believes about the matter.

3 - The book is about understanding earthly life (under the sun) from an entirely earthly perspective.

The Teacher’s method is to analyze only what we can see happening on earth (under the sun), and he limits himself to what we can experience and reason for ourselves. This point is really important for making sense of why the Teacher can’t find any meaning in life in his exploration. In other words, the Teacher’s intention is to show that we

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can’t make sense of life if we limit our scope and our methods to what is only “earthly”.

4 - Life under the sun is *hevel*: a mysterious, formless, short-lived, mist or vapour.

The way the Teacher makes this point is to call everything in life *hevel* – a Hebrew word that means vapor, mist, or breath. By that he means that earthly life is fragile, short-lived, and hard to make sense of. Many translations of *hevel* have been *vanity*, *meaningless*, or even *mysterious*.

5 - The conclusion: there is more to life than what we see “under the sun”. We know that what we do matters because we’ll be judged for it. And it is possible to make sense of life because we were created on purpose and with a purpose by God.

By the end of the book, the Teacher concludes that his earthly method only resulted in vanity or meaninglessness. But then he reminds us that there is more to what we see under the sun. We were made by God and will be judged by Him. That changes everything. Since we were made by God, there is some sense we can make of things. And since our actions will be judged by God, it must mean that they are not meaningless. Our actions make a difference, so much so that God holds us accountable for them.

6 - Ecclesiastes is not all that God wants to tell us.

Finally, the Teacher only hints at the beginning of an answer to the question about life’s meaning. God has revealed a lot more about life’s meaning than what we find in Ecclesiastes. Most important of all, through Jesus Christ he made a way for us to be forgiven and for life under the sun to be forever transformed. Because Christ took upon himself the guilt for our sins, we can face God’s judgment with confidence. And because of the

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resurrection, we know that life will be forever transformed and not be merely *hevel*. As we explore this amazing book, let us always allow our minds and hearts to drift back to Christ.

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