

Christ in the Hebrew Poets

The Futility of Work Redeemed-Christ in Ecclesiastes

Introduction: Fourth in this series, today we look at Ecclesiastes.

- Jesus taught that He was to be found in the Old Testament (search the Scriptures and Emmaus Road, began with Moses, prophets, and Psalms the things that spoke of Him.)
- Ecclesiastes is one of the most difficult books to find Him in.
- We know from Hebrews 11:6 that faith is a prerequisite for pleasing God
- Ecclesiastes is a book about faith struggle-Lord I believe, help my unbelief

About Ecclesiastes

Title—Ecclesiastes comes from the Hebrew title “Qoheleth” which comes from root “qahal” meaning to call or assemble. Literally Qoheleth is an assembler, or preacher, one who calls the people together to share wisdom.

Author—While some dispute this, the title says it is written by the “Son of David, King of Jerusalem” (1:1) and this would only be Solomon. At the very least, it is a Jew who is seeking to tell the story of Solomon.

Date—If it is Solomon it is between 970-930 BC (10th century when Solomon reigned)

Origin—Seems to be Jerusalem in the time of Solomon’s reign

Purpose—Seems to chronicle a life that tries to find satisfaction through many means but always ends up empty with life under the sun. It is vanity-meaningless.

Interpretive Considerations—Like all in the poetry genre it is important to see the whole book or story and learn the lesson rather than lifting out a single text and trying to proof text something carelessly.

What about Christ in Ecclesiastes?

Read the text again from the NASB (Ecclesiastes 4:1-4)

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun. I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is ^[a]vanity and striving after wind

- Ecclesiastes relates Solomon's futile attempts to find happiness in the things of this world.
- Wisdom, riches, women, drunkenness, building projects, humor, entertainment, etc., can never satisfy the heart.
- At each point Solomon satisfies himself and was disappointed, despairing of any lasting meaning or satisfaction in these earthly pleasures.
- At the end, in Ecclesiastes 12:13–14, he declares:

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

How should Christ be proclaimed from this passage?

Note the Grammar of the text:

- Fairly straightforward and presents no significant translation difficulties. The word “labor” (“toil, trouble, travail”) communicates the idea that all work is hard and wearisome in this fallen world.
- The word “skill” (“success”, “advantage”) refers to the capacity for success in work. “Rivalry” (“jealousy, envy”) denotes the character and motive of working in this world.
- The conclusion is that this characterization of work in this fallen world is “vanity” (“emptiness”) and “striving” (“grasping after”) after wind. The whole idea of the verse is that all work in this world and the seeking of success above others is motivated by man's envy and jealousy. It's ultimately empty of lasting meaning and cannot satisfy.

Consider History:

- Solomon gave himself to great building projects (2:4–11).
- He built gardens, ponds, stables, and great buildings.
- He extended his rule even beyond the borders of David. He built the great Temple that God did not permit David to build.
- But his life shows that he was conquered by his wealth and women. He declined spiritually to such a degree that the veracity of his faith is called into question.

This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.

- Ecclesiastes testifies to Solomon's wasted efforts, to his depression, and to his failure to seek God's glory. He died (1 Kings 11:43) and Rehoboam took his place, which resulted in a divided kingdom of Israel.

Theological Implications:

- Solomon is in Christ's genealogy (Matthew 1:6–7).
- Even in his failure, he was part of God's sovereign plan to bring the seed of the woman into the world (Genesis 3:15).
- This is a testimony to God's faithfulness throughout the OT, to His promise of a Redeemer to come from Israel, through the line of Abraham and David.
- Solomon was not worthy to be in Christ's line. There are no good men of the flesh since the fall of Adam.

TRUTH: We can see, however, the Law and the Gospel at work in Solomon's life through what he concluded in Ecclesiastes 4:4.

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is ^[a]vanity and striving after wind. Ecclesiastes 4:4

- Futility of Solomon's efforts without God's glory in view
- The fallenness of man seeking the things of this world
- The evil of envy and selfish pursuit

(ILL) The Picture of Dorian Gray

Dorian Gray, based on an Oscar Wilde novel, is about a young, hedonistic British aristocrat of the late 1800s, Dorian Gray, who commissions his friend, Basil, to paint a portrait of him. When it's finished, Dorian prays that he will not grow older, but that the picture of him would. As time passes, he sees that the picture changes not only with age, but it also becomes more unsightly with each sin he commits. Still, he himself retains his youth. Twenty years later, the youthful Dorian shows the picture to the artist Basil, who hasn't seen it since its creation.

As Dorian and Basil enter the room where the portrait is kept, Dorian states, "You think it's only God who sees the soul." Basil pulls down the cloth covering the painting and is stunned by what he sees. The painting displays not the youthful Dorian, but a hideous Dorian, skin and clothing wrinkled—wretched beyond belief.

Alarmed, Basil exclaims, "But this is monstrous, beyond nature, beyond reason! What does it mean?"

Dorian, without emotion, explains, "On the day you finished this painting, I made a wish. Perhaps you would call it a prayer. My wish was granted."

Basil, appraising the painting, says, "It has the eyes of the devil."

Dorian responds, "Each of us has heaven and hell in him."

"If this is true, if this is what you have done with your life," Basil says, "it is far worse than anything that's been said of you. Do you know how to pray, Dorian? What was it we were taught to say in our boyhood? 'Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash away our iniquities.' Let's say them together."

Dorian laments, "It's too late, Basil."

Basil explains, "The prayer of your pride was answered. The prayer of your repentance may be answered also."

"You think I haven't tried?" Dorian replies. "I tell you it's no use."

Basil argues, "Isn't there a verse somewhere—'though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them white as snow.' I can still pray, Dorian, if you can't."

Afraid that Basil will divulge his knowledge of the portrait, Dorian stabs him. By the end of the film, Dorian hates himself and seeks to live a good and moral life. The horrible painting is the only evidence of his sinful life, so he decides to destroy it. He stabs his portrait in the heart, then realizes that he has stabbed himself. Soon his friends enter the room and see an immaculate picture of a youthful Dorian and a monstrous man dead on the floor.

- Note also, the very opposite of these realities in the glorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who follow Him.

Consider:

A. God's original purpose for humanity and work

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all^[b] the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."³⁰ Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so.³¹ Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Genesis 1:26-31

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰ Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Hiddekel,^[b] it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹⁵ Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:8-17

B. The curse of death and toil in the fall of Adam and his descendants.

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. ¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:17-19

C. The present attitude of labor and business in this world.

1. Dog-eat dog
2. People complain about their jobs all the time
3. Work is a drudgery (see social media)
4. Hard to find people to work

D. The hope for the Christian to have a life of purpose and meaning.

1. To rejoice always in the Lord
2. Believe God orders our steps
3. To be content
4. Paul’s charge—

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”

4 Lines of Truth to Explore Briefly

I. First, the futility of Solomon's labors for satisfaction under the sun.

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. ⁵ I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶ I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. (Ecclesiastes 2:4-6)

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. ¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11

- A. The amazing accomplishments of Solomon's labor.
- B. The depressing lack of satisfaction after his success.
- C. His observation of the fallen world's motivation in all labor without God.

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is ^{1a}vanity and striving after wind. Ecclesiastes 4:4

- D. His conclusion of vanity.
- E. Hope for Solomon: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. ¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

II. Second, the futility of ALL labor for satisfaction under the sun.

- A. This fallen world cannot fulfill man's search for success and meaning.
- B. Our own fallen nature breaks God's Law against idolatry in worshipping pleasure and self-importance. We want something other than God to fulfill us and it becomes an idol.
- C. Solomon experienced this futility-(Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)
- D. Several Examples in Scripture

1. Rich Fool

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’¹⁸ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.’¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’”²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’²¹ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:16-21

2. Rich Man and Lazarus

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell^[d] from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house,²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” Luke 16:19-31

3. The words of Jesus are helpful here

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?²⁷ For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Matthew 16:24–27.

III. Jesus modeled perfect and consecrated work in His incarnation and earthly ministry

A. His attitude

1. John 4:34: my meat is to do the will of Him who sent and finish His work
2. Matthew 26:41–42 – your will be done in Gethsemane.
3. He fulfilled the Law's demand for perfect labor for God's glory.

B. The work of Christ was difficult in a fallen world

1. Hebrews 12:2ff (endured cross, contradiction of sinners, bloodshed)
2. The trial and crucifixion was brutal

C. But He completed and perfected His work

1. It is finished
2. It was perfected-***“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” Hebrews 5:9***
3. Continues to be effective-***“Who is He who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” Romans 8:34.***

IV. Fourth, because Christ redeemed labor, we can work for the glory of God again!

- A. **One aspect of our work is Kingdom work** (Jesus said in John 9-“I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, the night comes when no man can work.” (John 9:4)
- B. **The redemption of all labor unto the glory of God:** Colossians 3:17. This is now possible

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17

- C. The hopeful promise of success in all our labor for God's glory because of the redemption and resurrection of Christ: 1 Corinthians 15:57–58.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

D. Our response in all our life and work: 2 Corinthians 5:14–15.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Conclusion

- All the labor of Solomon was vanity because he was condemned by the Law of seeking his own pleasure instead of God's glory.
- All the labor of Jesus Christ was successful and perfect because He sought the glory of God.
- Because Christ's labor fulfilled what Adam failed to do, and because of His success in His person and work for sinners, we may be forgiven of a self-seeking life and live a God-glorifying life that has true purpose and meaning.

Lessons:

1. Our work, no matter what it is as long as it is not sinful, can be holy
2. Our work should be integral to our lives (Jesus was as much the Son of God when he was in the carpenter shop as He was healing a blind man)
3. Our work should be done for His glory
4. Our work in the workplace is as important as our service to the church
5. We are bringing the kingdom in our labor

(ILL) The Chicago River

In October 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of the bustling city of Chicago. But, surprisingly, the flames actually started on the other side of the Chicago River. So how did the fire cross over the river and reach Chicago?

The river-jumping fire is partially explained by the high winds that spread the fire to wooden ships moored in the river. But there was also another even more important factor in the spread of the fire. In those days, the Chicago River was a shallow, sluggish sewer for the entire city. The Union Stock Yards in Chicago dumped all their animal waste into the river. People called it "The Stinking River" or "Bubbly Creek." It was so bad that the waste was actually combustible.

All of this putrefaction flowed into Lake Michigan, where there were drinking-water intakes for the city. Waterborne diseases broke out. Every year through the 1880s and 1890s, at least 10,000 people died from cholera and typhoid fever. In 1885, fourteen years after the Great Chicago Fire, nearly 100,000 people died from illnesses carried by the river's putrid waters.

Finally, city engineers took action. First, they started digging 28 miles of canal. They moved more earth and rocks than were moved building the Panama Canal. They set in locks and gates. Then, on January 2, 1900, a worker opened a sluice gate at Lake Michigan, and the entire Great Lakes flowed into the Chicago River, pushing it a

direction it had never flowed. They reversed the flow of the Chicago River. It now flowed the opposite way—into the canal, into the Des Plaines River, into the Illinois River, and into the Mississippi.

This brought a huge flow of fresh water. Instead of shallow, sluggish, diseased water, making the community sick, the river now brought the city life. Some writers argue that Chicago would not even be around today, had the flow of the Chicago River not been reversed. The American Society of Civil Engineers named it one of the engineering projects of the millennium.

There's a similar principle at work in our relationship with Christ—but what Jesus does is even more astonishing: he reverses the flow of the human soul. Instead of the shallow, sluggish, diseased waters of human sinfulness, Jesus has opened the sluice gates of new and living water into our lives.