



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

1 - God's Books of Wisdom

Announcements:

1/24 @7:30 -

Prayer

1/25 @6:30 -

Grace Group

1/28 @8:30 -

Sunday School

~~1/28 @6:00 -~~

~~Family Night~~

~~CANCELED~~

ICE BREAKER: Do you consider yourself a wise person? Why or why not?

READ: Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

One of the most important things when reading any book of the Bible is knowing and understanding its genre. We just finished Matthew, which is a very particular genre of “Gospel” (a narrative story focusing on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus-- turns out there are only four books in the world of this particular genre!). Ecclesiastes is in the genre of “Poetry” or as I prefer “Wisdom”. But this is not necessarily as helpful as knowing other genres might be, because, as we will see, in the books of Wisdom, Ecclesiastes sticks out a bit like a sore thumb. So today let’s try and understand what makes this book so unique.

One of the best ways to see the uniqueness of Ecclesiastes is to compare some of its thoughts to what is probably the most famous book of wisdom: Proverbs. One of the main themes of Proverbs is that wisdom and knowledge are blessings and something to be cherished and sought after. Proverbs 16:16 says: “How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.” Wisdom is seen personified in beauty and grace. Finally, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” says Proverbs 1:7. But the writer of Ecclesiastes has a *much* different take on this: “ And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18) So we can ask: what is going on? And why are these two books so different? While there is much we can say about the difference between a wise thought and a sermon (which is in one sense the fundamental difference between these two books), there is a heart issue that can illuminate the difference here too. Zack Erswine in his commentary drives this point home: “Proverbs focuses on norms and rules, Ecclesiastes focuses on



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the exceptions”. In other words, Proverbs tells us how the world SHOULD be. Ecclesiastes meets us where the world often truly is. It is for this reason that we need the book of Ecclesiastes. It gives us wisdom we can turn to when “train up a child the way he should go” doesn’t seem to pan out the way we want. It can give us wisdom to live in the world where the righteous *does not* prosper in all that he does while the wicked sometimes *do*.

DISCUSS: Why is it so important that God give us a book of “exceptions”? In what ways can you see this need in your life or the lives of others?

But there is one more thought I would like to help us with today to best understand this peculiar book. I don’t think that I could ever say it better than Douglass O’Donnell did in his commentary on Ecclesiastes (fun bit of trivia, he also wrote my favorite commentary on Matthew!):

This book makes better sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ... Words such as meaningless, wearisome, folly, etc describe life as it really is. Life without God is futile. But for the believer, redeemed by the blood of Christ, life takes on meaning, and there is hope for all of life’s tough questions. The colors included in the banner [of a picture to symbolize the Book of Ecclesiastes] all have meaning. Black symbolizes life lived in struggle and confusion with no hope; the gold of the cross that cuts through the entire design symbolizes the redeeming work of Christ, who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father in Heaven; the red background at the top of the design stands for Christ’s blood shed for us, offering us a hopeful and eternal worldview. *Jesus Christ redeemed us from the vanity that Pastor Solomon so wrestled with and suffered under by subjecting himself to our temporary, meaningless, futile, incomprehensible, incongruous, absurd, smoke-curling-up-into-the-air, mere-breath, vain life.*

In other words, Ecclesiastes uniquely points us to the savior who can sympathize with our weakness (See Heb 4:15) and who entered into this world to give light and meaning to this otherwise meaningless life!

DISCUSS: In what ways can we see the hope of Christ in the midst of the meaninglessness of Ecclesiastes? Why is it so important to see Christ as the fulfillment even of this?

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