

“Destined to be Unfulfilled”

Intro:

A. How would you explain the definition of a “theme”?

- i.** Perhaps if it is a sermon series, it would be the topics that they revolve around
- ii.** If you are reading a history book that makes frequent reference to various Presidents, Senators, etc, you might say it had political themes:
- iii.** One of the more helpful illustrations is that of a musical theme: A set of notes that occurs multiple times throughout a piece of music: Something that makes it instantly recognizable no matter what point in the song you come in on.

B. If we were to ask what the theme of Ecclesiastes is, what would you say?

- i.** Perhaps you’d compare it to Proverbs: a book of practical advice
- ii.** Maybe you’d say its a book about living life
- iii.** The paths to take, the paths to avoid...
- iv.** You could probably come up with several good answers

C. In my reading through Ecclesiastes, the defining characteristic for me is *Vanity*

- i.** Consider that the word occurs at least 37 times throughout the books, not counting similar phrases
- ii.** All in all, the book is a fairly depressing read: Until the closing verses of the book, there is little hope offered for a meaningful life:
- iii.** The writer’s conclusion is this: Life, no matter what you do with it is *Vain*., unless you’ve spent it serving God:

D. Not spoken from a point of limited experience:

- i.** Didn’t meet with a disappointing end to one or two ventures and come to despair
- ii.** These are the conclusions from taking many different paths, having both success and failures along the way
- iii.** Solomon concludes that there is only one path that will fulfill, and anything else is vanity:

-Begin with one that shouldn’t be all that surprising, but is something that always worth reminding ourselves of:

i. The Path of Works:

a. One reason Solomon gives for works being unfulfilling is that you will eventually they will fall out of your possession; and you will lose control: *Ecc. 2:18-23*

i. (Illustration of Cabinet Shops)

ii. The morality, the nobility, the time spent, effort expended; none of these matter: They cannot give it more permanence or stability

iii. Either in your lifetime or after, someone or something will come along and undo what you've accomplished, or make it obsolete

1. Consider the example of Rehoboam in *1 Kings 12*

a. All of the hard work Solomon toiled was undone in a moment by the brash declaration:

"My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!"

b. The greatest Kingdom physical Israel would ever see: gone-- *Is that how Solomon imagined it going down? David?*

b. A second reason Solomon gives is that the type of fulfillment works offer, are not what we really crave, desire, and need: *Ecc. 2:4-6*

i. Stop and think: Is there anyone who could claim more personally responsibility for building more works, either numerically or majestically?

1. Consider this listing of his works in *1 Chronicles 8-9*:

a. He built more cities than those before him

b. He fortified the existing cities with strong walls and defensive gates

c. He built fine houses for his numerous wives

d. Sadly, he also built many altars for them too

e. He built thrones, shields, and even stairs of Gold

f. Would build for himself a great palace

g. Eventually he would accomplish his greatest work: The Temple

ii. But none of these great works lasted: ***list fates***

iii. And none of them provided fulfillment: *Ecc. 2:9-11*

1. There is a reason: God has placed a specific desire within our hearts: *Ecc. 3:11*

2. No amount of temporal works can ever fill that hole.

- To those who have made the choice to follow God, or even those who have just lived a while, this doesn't come as a surprise: But the next path that Solomon declares to be vain is not the first one that comes to mind:

2. The Path of Wisdom:

- a. But doesn't that conflict with the general principle of scripture, to seek out wisdom?
 - i. What about passages like:
 1. Deut. 4:6 declares keeping the word of God to be wisdom
 2. Deut. 34:9 Joshua was filled with wisdom
 3. Psalm 111:10: fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom
 4. Proverbs 2:2 Make your heart attentive...
 5. Proverbs 3:13 how blessed is the man...
 - ii. For something that is so thoroughly recommended in scripture, how can wisdom be unfulfilling?
- b. Solomon first states that **Wisdom** Leads to Heartache: *Ecc. 1:16-18*
 - i. Solomon is *not* coining the phrase: Ignorance is bliss
 - ii. Nor is he communicating that the acquisition of a difficult task
 - iii. What he is stating is the extremely burdensome nature of wisdom: The more that you know about this world, the more you will come to understand how God's creation has failed to live up to His standard: *and there's nothing you can do to change it:*
 - iv. Read these verses again in their fuller context: *1:12-18*
 1. The latter portion of verse 16 communicates that Solomon had seen all there was to see and had given much thought to it
 2. What he saw was man trapped in an endless cycle: v 14
 3. Imagine the helplessness that the wisest man in all the earth must have felt: His wisdom gave him the power to expose and recognize problems, but he was powerless to affect any lasting change on the world at large.
- c. Solomon's second reason, is that **Wise** men still turn back to dust: *Ecc. 2:9-17*
 - i. In the desperation of v 12, Solomon asks; What good is wisdom?
 - ii. in verses 9-11, Solomon has reached certain conclusions. Because of those he turns his attention to the Kings who will come after him:

iii. Because the shortcomings of wisdom have been exposed, what reason is there for future Kings to choose it over the path of the fool?

1. Verse 13 states with resounding certainty that there is benefit
2. It can improve your quality of life
 - a. You can avoid the mistakes of others, avoid repeating your own, give council etc.
3. But in the end, (v14) regardless of which path you chose, you are still buried in the tomb
 - a. We are once again left with Solomon's exclamation of frustration (V17)

Applications:

- We've only looked at two of the pursuits that Solomon declared to be vain, paths that were destined to leave us unfulfilled from the start.
- There are many others explored in this book; but all of them are leading to one great, bright spot: an exciting conclusion: *Ecc. 12:13*
- Ecclesiastes was not written to depress people: It was written to bring hope! To free people from the endless cycles of unfulfillment and vanity that Solomon saw them toiling in day after day!
- There is so much for us to spend our time pursuing under this sun: There are noble causes that we can devote time to, there are frivolous pursuits we can waste our time with
- But if we are looking to anything that falls outside of service to God to define us as people or fulfill the desire of our souls, we are wasting our time:
- The only pursuit that gives our lives meaning is "fearing God and keeping his commandments"
 - When our wisdom, our works, our money, relationships, etc fall in line with that pursuit, it is only then that they will have true value, and bring fulfillment.