

Ecclesiastes Intro

As we come to the book of Ecclesiastes it is interesting to note that the author does not name himself. Instead he refers to himself as the Preacher.

In the Hebrew O.T. Scriptures his name is *Koheleth* which means preacher. In the Greek Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, his name is *Ekklesiastes* which is a derivative of the Greek *Ekklesia* which means assembly. And so, *Ekklesiastes* intimates one who speaks to the assembly, thus, Preacher.

And who would comprise the assembly during Solomon's day?

In the context of Solomon addressing this group it would be primarily Israel. But the Assembly of God must also include all who name the name of the Creator and Lord and follow His covenant promises.

When Jesus commissioned Peter to feed His sheep He was commissioning Him to tend the church.

Matthew 16:18 ¹⁸ "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

The word church is the Greek word *ekklesia*, the exact same word used in the Greek Septuagint describing Israel. And so, there is a natural transition from the assembly of Israel to the assembly or church of Christ because they both identify the same group; a called out people to represent the Most High God and Savior.

And this is why the church, made up of both Jew and Gentile, is described by Paul as the Israel of God.

Galatians 6:14-16 ¹⁴ But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For ***neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*** ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon ***the Israel of God.***

When writing the Ephesians Paul continues to point out how two groups, that is Jew and Gentile, have been brought together under one head, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:13-16 ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, *who made both groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, so that in Himself *He might make the two into one new man, thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might *reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross*, by it having put to death the enmity.

But simply being identified with the assembly, as in the case of national Israel during Solomon's time, or the church during our time, does not necessarily mean that either group will be faithful to the end.

This is why Theologians often refer to the church as two distinct groups under the heading of the one group. And so, you have what is referred to as the visible or universal church and the invisible or true church of Christ.

What group of people would make up the visible church?

All people who make an orthodox profession of faith as they identify themselves with a local body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By orthodox I mean any group that holds to the essentials of the faith as revealed in the word of God: the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the sinless perfect life of Christ who is fully God and fully man, His crucifixion, burial and resurrection for the remission of sins.

This could include both liberal and conservative professors of the faith. It could include groups, like the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodists, the Baptists, Presbyterians or any other orthodox group that names the name of Christ.

This is not to say that these groups are necessarily faithful to the Scriptures to teach or preach the truth without compromise, only that they would hold to these essentials and therefore identify themselves as part of the church.

And so, as the world sees them as part of the visible church they therefore come under that banner.

What is the inherent problem with this group?

You have both true believers and unbelievers coming under that banner called the church. And this is what Jesus was referring to when he taught on the wheat and the tares growing up together in the same field.

Matthew 13:25-30 ²⁵ "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' *The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'* ²⁹ "But he said, '*No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.*' ³⁰ '*Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."*'"

This is the visible church. But who makes up the invisible church?

All true believers from all time, both alive today and in the future, and those who have gone to be with the Lord who now reside in the present heaven.

Why would they be called the invisible church?

Not because they are invisible or can't be identified, but because they are all true believers who are indwelt with the Spirit of God whom only God ultimately can identify.

This is why only God could say this.

Matthew 7:22-23 ²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

You and I can only deal with the visible aspect of the church where people make a profession of faith, but who may be wolves in sheep's clothing. This does not mean we can't be discerning to distinguish the real from the fake, but it does mean that ultimately only God can make the final judgment as only He knows those who are truly His sheep.

And this was true in Israel. All Jews of Solomon's day came under the heading, the Assembly, or the visible church of that day. But within that larger group was the remnant or true believers, the invisible church, those who would not bow the knee to false gods.

Solomon is addressing the larger group in which is the smaller group who have ears to hear and eyes to see. And his message is one of considering that this world is not our home and therefore we must not plant our roots too deeply here in this world, because to do so will only disappoint and ultimately distract us from our true mission which is to declare the promises of hope in God to a dying world.

Jesus made it clear to the entire visible church and the world-at-large.

John 12:25-26 ²⁵ "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

This was also the message that Paul gave to the invisible church at the visible church in Rome.

Romans 12:1-2 ^{NAU} Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We who are in Christ live in a world that is pure vanity, that is senseless, without the knowledge of who we are in Christ and where we are going with Christ.

This is why we study to show ourselves approved. Without a firm foundation in the truth of God's word we find ourselves being swept here and there by every wind of doctrine that ultimately turns out to be doctrines of demons.

And that doctrine always, in every case, elevates this world to the exclusion of the one true God and His eternal kingdom.

Again, this is Solomon's point and as we move through this we'll see it clearly.

We won't be able to get too far into it this evening but as we read through just the first chapter, we'll get a pretty good taste of what Solomon has in store for us throughout the rest of Ecclesiastes.

The other thing we need to keep in mind is that unless Jesus Christ is identified in the pages of Ecclesiastes then we've again missed the point to all of this. Let's turn to the first chapter.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 ^{NAU} The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

Here the Preacher identifies himself as the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

There weren't many people who could identify themselves as the son of David and king in Israel. In fact only one. That would be Solomon. And Solomon had been on a journey in this world that is nothing short of remarkable from a human standpoint.

But who else could be identified as the Son of David, King of Jerusalem?

Matthew 12:22-23 ²² Then a demon-possessed man *who was blind and mute* was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. ²³ ***All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"***

It was a common understanding that the Messiah would be called the son of David and this is why these people were asking the question in light of Jesus's miracles. This they understood from reading the O.T. Scriptures.

Matthew 20:30-31 ³⁰ And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "***Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!***" ³¹ The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Matthew 22:41-46 ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² "**What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?**" **They said to Him, "The son of David."** ⁴³ He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, ⁴⁴ **THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET ""?** ⁴⁵ "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Revelation 19:16 ¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Solomon was a type of Christ and therefore points to the One who would sit on David's throne to rule over His people as King of Kings and Lord of Lord's.

But during Solomon's life he had power, wealth, wisdom and a God who has placed him in the position of shepherding a people that belong to God. If anyone could say that this life is worth living for it would be Solomon. But instead he views life as vanity.

The word vanity could be literally translated vapor or breath.

It gives the same sense that James writes in his epistle.

^{NAU} **James 4:14** Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

But the idea of being a vapor carries the thought that just as a vapor appears for a little while and then vanishes away so too does the meaning of life without a proper context.

In fact, this is why the NIV translates it this way.

^{NIV} **Ecclesiastes 1:2** "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

Now, again if we stopped there we must assume that life has no meaning and is utterly unworthy of being lived out. Enter the perfect reason for legalizing suicide. If life has no meaning, in other words, if there is no Creator God, and we are all just a product of chance and time and random molecules coming together to form these blobs of protoplasm we call human beings, what difference does it make how we live or die?

In fact, Solomon is going to make that exact case. But again, remember who his audience is. He is the Preacher speaking to the congregation, and by extension to all who call upon the name of God as they enter into the covenant community called the visible church. So, he's speaking to you and me.

Ecclesiastes 1:3-9 ³ What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? ⁴ A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever. ⁵ Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there *again*. ⁶ Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns. ⁷ All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again. ⁸ All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.

By the way, this is not a text of Scripture that the Norman Vincent Peale's, Robert Schuller's or Joel Olsteen's of this world would be preaching from because it does not appear to be very uplifting or positive.

In fact, these people would actually teach just the opposite of what Solomon is preaching and that is that this world is not vanity or meaningless. You are a child of the king and He only wants your happiness and your success and your comfortableness as you take advantage of the positive power of God in your life.

And the tragedy in this type of preaching is that there is an element of truth in it. We are children of the King and He does desire that we find our joy and comfort in Him. But unless we couple that with the fact that this world is not our home we will confuse what the final expression of our hope is with the present reality that this world is passing away.

1 John 2:15-17 ¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

This does not mean that we do not appreciate the world in which we live because it is still a gift from God to all human beings; its beauty, majesty and complexity as that which was spoken into existence to be used to bring glory to God.

When God says that we should not love the world He is not referring first and foremost to the planet earth. The planet earth is not in and of itself evil. In fact, it was deemed very good by God in the beginning.

So, all of creation, including the world or earth, is God's workmanship to demonstrate His power and glory. But when our Lord uses the word world in the context of Ecclesiastes or in 1John, He is speaking of the sinful and cursed aspect of humanity tied to this world and its system of worship that has exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

It speaks of the attitude all rebellious men have toward God which is hatred and a conscious choice to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. And it is the reality that, because of man's sin toward God, all of creation has been cursed and will be judged by God on the final day.

With all of this in mind, why would anyone put their hope and faith in this kind of world that is only meant to be destroyed on that last day when Christ returns to gather His people together and destroy the rebellious and the universe in judgment?

What are we living for? If it's not this world, then what? That is Solomon's point.

The world in its cursed and sinful condition has excluded God from His own creation and so they are only left with this world. This is why there is so much money spent on the next new thing and the next new discovery that extends life or beautifies the ugly or strengthens the feeble for another year or two.

Solomon may not have had access to the technology we have today but he could say, there is nothing new under the sun.

What do you suppose he meant by this in light of the fact that there are many new things under the sun that he did not possess, like computers, airplanes, the internet and so forth?

All things created by man are designed for one main purpose and that is to make life easier for men in a fallen world. In this way, it

elevates man to a status of god since he is the director of his own future. I will create medicines to make me live longer.

Did man have medicines during Solomon's day?

I will make travel easier so as to stay in touch with those around the world.

Did people travel in Solomon's day through other means than walking?

I will communicate with the world in ways that are beyond belief.

Did man communicate with people around the world during Solomon's day?

Man is doing what man has always done, just in different degrees. There really is nothing new under the sun, but man pursues what he believes is something new because it makes him feel relevant and empowered.

This is what you need when you replace the Creator with the creature and the creation. And when we come back here next week we'll see this more clearly.

Paul understood what life was all about and he understood that even when life was hard he didn't think his future was vanity. But again, he knew that the world to come, not this world, was his home. He spoke about it when writing the Romans.

Romans 8:18-25 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, (vanity), not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.