

Futility, Meaning, and Life Under the Sun  
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- I. Haunting Questions
- II. Bird's-Eye View of Ecclesiastes
  - a. Sound bites or more?
  - b. Two voices in Ecclesiastes
    - i. Qohelet ("Preacher" or "Teacher") 1:12 – 12:7
    - ii. Narrator 1:1–11; 12:8–14
  - c. Qohelet's quest (see 1:13, 1:3, 2:3b)
  - d. "Hevel"
    - i. Vanity (ESV), futility (CSB), enigma
    - ii. Literally "vapor" or "smoke"
- III. The Futility of Life Under the Sun
  - a. 1:3 poses a key question, "What does a person *gain* for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?" (CSB). What's the payoff?
  - b. Qohelet's observations/conclusions
    - i. "nothing to be gained" (2:11)
    - ii. "no advantage" (3:19)
    - iii. "everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind" (1:14, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:16, 6:9)
    - iv. Whether he examines work, accomplishments, pleasure or even the accumulation of human wisdom itself—he says it is hevel!
  - c. Why? The reality of death as the great equalizer
    - i. The presence of death pervades the book of Ecclesiastes (2:16, 3:2, 3:19, 7:1, 7:17, 7:26, 8:8, 9:5)
    - ii. "You can't take it with you" (see 5:15)
    - iii. We try to bury this reality
    - iv. Ecclesiastes is a severe mercy to us, helping us see that anything we put our ultimate hope in apart from Christ is an unstable foundation for meaning, purpose, and true joy.
- IV. The Good of Life Under the Sun
  - a. In spite of the futility and enigma of life, Qohelet commends simple pleasures
  - b. The "nothing better" statements
    - i. 2:24–25
    - ii. 3:12–13
    - iii. 3:22
    - iv. 8:15
  - c. Life is futile, a chasing after the wind. Life is good; enjoy the gifts of God fully—the major and minor keys of Ecclesiastes.

- d. Without this tension, we will lurch increasingly toward either blind optimism about life or despairing pessimism.
- V. How Then Shall We Live According to Ecclesiastes?
- a. The author's framing statement in 12:13 is critical for the way forward: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."
  - b. Interpret life under the sun through a God-centered lens
  - c. Don't take God's gifts and make them gods
  - d. Embrace your creatureliness
  - e. Receive the gifts of the present day
  - f. But . . . what about death?
- VI. How Jesus Rescues Us from Hevel
- a. Jesus enters into hevel itself through his life and his death
  - b. Jesus triumphs over hevel by his resurrection
  - c. Jesus rescues and gives new life to his people, eternal life that begins now even as we live in this world filled with futility
  - d. Jesus helps us live open-handedly with the gifts of time, relationships, work, possessions, and accomplishments
  - e. Jesus helps us live patiently with the mysteries, heartaches, and frustrations of life under the sun, knowing that one day all will be addressed with perfect wisdom and judgment