

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL  
A KINGDOM *established*  
GOD ALL WISE  
*Solomon Reflects on the Meaning of Life*

Today's lesson on Solomon's life reflections calls us to consider our own life's meaning. Our study guide quotes Tom Brady, New England Patriots quarterback, as saying, "Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there is something greater out there for me? I mean maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what it is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me. I think...it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. I'm 27 and what else is there for me?" Tom Brady has learned early in life when you reach the top there is nothing there.

My grandfather, H.F. Jamison, who never reached Tom Brady's pinnacle of success observed later in his life, "just when we learn to live, we drag off to the grave."

Some may deny that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes; however, the first verse identifies the author as being the son of David and king of Jerusalem so that settles it for me. Solomon is undeniably the book's author. It is easy to question why someone with God given wisdom such as Solomon possessed would stray from following the LORD's ways. And yet, in the end, Solomon was no different than any other human – he was a man defined by the life choices he made. Those choices were made to please his carnal nature and in the end those choices left him with feelings of futility regarding life. I suspect that Solomon hoped that his readers would profit from his findings and not feel the need to personally travel the road to futility that he followed.

We studied last week how Solomon's sin took him away from God in the later years of his reign. His words in Ecclesiastes are the record of that decline. From Solomon's experience, we are called to be mindful of what we desire and what drives us. Even when we are walking with the LORD, we must continually remind ourselves to stick with God's agenda and not our own. If our dreams and desires are not God-centered, they will never truly satisfy and we will not hear *well done good and faithful servant*. when we see Jesus!

The 'wise' King's Solomon's first question is: Does life have meaning?

**Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.* <sup>2</sup> *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.* <sup>3</sup> *What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?* <sup>4</sup> *A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.* <sup>5</sup> *The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.* <sup>6</sup> *The wind*

*blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.* <sup>7</sup> *All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.* <sup>8</sup> *All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* <sup>9</sup> *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.* <sup>10</sup> *Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us.* <sup>11</sup> *There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.*

Saying that everything is vanity sounds depressing, but keep Solomon's point of view in mind. He writes in ***Ecclesiastes 1:14 (ESV)*** <sup>14</sup> *I have seen everything that is done **under the sun**, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.* Solomon repeats the phrase *under the sun* 28 times (if I counted right) throughout the book. Solomon is only reflecting on life *under the sun*. When we have put our faith and trust in the King of the Ages, there is no need to be discouraged by Solomon's words. His reflections are a reminder of how meaningless it is to live our lives to the exclusion of God Almighty. From a godless point of view it is true, everything is vanity.

There are times when it is easy to become weary with the routine of daily living. Solomon bleakly asks, *"What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"* We are given the answer in the New Testament in ***Colossians 3:23 (ESV)*** <sup>23</sup> *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.* We need to remember that monotony opens the door for time to think on the Lord. ***Philippians 4:8 (ESV)*** <sup>8</sup> *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Solomon mourns over the lack of permanence in this life. His father David saw the same thing. ***Psalms 39:5 (ESV)*** <sup>5</sup> *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah* And yet, David quickly concludes in ***Psalms 39:7 (ESV)*** <sup>7</sup> *"And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.* A life built on Jesus will last. ***Matthew 7:24-25 (ESV)*** <sup>24</sup> *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.* <sup>25</sup> *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.*

Solomon also notes the repetitiveness of the earth itself and yet we know that nature's repetitiveness is a significant promise of God to us. After the flood God promised Noah that there would be no more interruption of the cycle of nature in ***Genesis 8:22 (ESV)*** <sup>22</sup> *While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.* It is a good thing that the sun rises and the sun goes down and that the wind follows a pattern and that the seas do as well. Yes, the seasons come and go, generations come and go but *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* ***Hebrews 13:8***

Solomon moaned, *there is nothing new under the sun*. And this is true in life under the sun. But of life IN THE SON, we read in **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* If you have found yourself caught up in the dreariness and dullness of life under the sun, turn to Jesus. **Revelation 21:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

Solomon asks a question we frequently wonder in our messed up world today: Is there justice and goodness in this world?

**Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-17 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.* <sup>17</sup> *I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.*

Believers and unbelievers both can see that wickedness and evil rule this world in place of righteousness. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, they forfeited their oversight of the created world to their Adversary – the Devil. There is a war going on between good and evil. But, Jesus said regarding our Adversary in **John 12:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup> *... the ruler of this world be cast out.* I think we need to give Solomon some sympathy regarding his reflections on life. He did not have the advantage that we possess – we have been the rest of the story. **Revelation 11:15 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”*

**Read Ecclesiastes 3:18-21 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.* <sup>19</sup> *For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.* <sup>20</sup> *All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.* <sup>21</sup> *Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?*

Evolution says that man was a beast and became a man. God tests us to reveal what we really are. When we leave God out of our life, we are nothing more than an animal. **Psalms 32:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*

Don't misinterpret verses 19 and 20. Solomon is not saying that there is no difference between man and animals. He is speaking of the truth that both man and animal die and return to the dust.

Solomon asks a question that is still frequently asked by doubters today: *Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward.* A little later Solomon answers his own question in ***Ecclesiastes 12:7 (ESV)***<sup>7</sup> *and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

Now, we turn to Solomon's final question: What are we on earth for?

***Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 (ESV)***<sup>9</sup> *Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.*<sup>10</sup> *The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.*<sup>11</sup> *The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.*<sup>12</sup> *My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*<sup>13</sup> *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*<sup>14</sup> *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

Solomon was not bragging – he possessed God-given wisdom. He was wise; he was orderly; he was careful in his collections and his writing. His intent was to share his wisdom with those who would come after. He reveals that his collected sayings were given by one Shepherd. Who might that shepherd be? Jesus said in ***John 10:11 (ESV)***<sup>11</sup> *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

The picture of Solomon's careful work ethic is also found in the New Testament. ***Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV)***<sup>15</sup> *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,*<sup>16</sup> *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

His words were meant to bring delight not despair. ***Psalms 37:4 (ESV)***<sup>4</sup> *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Solomon made a lot of mistakes in the middle years of his walk with God. Sadly those experiences gave him firsthand knowledge of the cost of straying from God. Solomon also recognized that a person can seek answers in the wrong places – read too many books – listen to false teachers in sheep's clothing. ***Matthew 7:15 (ESV)***<sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*

With all of his wisdom Solomon over a lifetime came to a conclusion so simple that even a child can understand. *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*