

When we read Ecclesiastes we have the opportunity to sit at the feet of a wise sage who has seen and done it all. The author of Ecclesiastes has experienced the world and learned from these experiences, just as we learn and gain more perspective from traveling the world. And we get to learn from this man who has gained such wisdom. In Ecclesiastes 1:1 the author is described as the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Many scholars believe this is Solomon, but any king in the Davidic line could be referred to as the son of David (like Jesus), and there is legitimate debate about whether Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. In many places this book hints that Solomon is the author, so at least the author was writing with the voice and perspective of Solomon. For our purposes, therefore, we will consider Solomon as the author.

So let's go over what we know about Solomon. We know he asked for wisdom from God, and that God gave him wealth and honor along with wisdom. Solomon was renowned throughout the land because of his wealth, wisdom, and power. He built the Temple in 7 years and built his palace in 13 years. But he also stumbled by marrying many foreign women who ensnared him and led him away from God to worship idols. All these experiences gave Solomon perspective about life. He had it all, and now teaches us what is actually important in life. The word "teacher" in v. 1 is the Hebrew word *qohelet*, translated in Greek as *ekklesiastes*, which is related to the word *ekklesia*, meaning gathering or church. The word *qohelet* connotes both a teacher as well as a gatherer. Think about a grandfather who has experienced life and gathers the family around him to share his wisdom. And it's important that we gather and listen, because Solomon's wisdom is from God. His words are God's words. We are used to questioning everything, but when you sit before the *qohelet*, you listen. You don't argue to talk back, because though what he says is different than you might think, it's right. He's been down so many paths, and he knows which ones lead to a dead end. He wants us to take the right path, so let us sit before him and listen.

In 1:2, Solomon tells us that everything is meaningless. The word used here is *hevel*, which means vapor, breath, fleeting, vain, absurd, or of no lasting value. It's the things we do and plan for that are very short term, but have no long term value or importance. *Qohelet* tells us

that the things we all fill our lives with are not fulfilling. They have no lasting value. He pleads with those who are gathered before him not to pursue meaningless things. Solomon pursued all kinds of things during his life, and he achieved them all. But in the end, it was all for nothing. We need to understand that the things many of us pursue in this world lead to a dead end. They will not fulfill, and they will not last.

*Qohelet* goes on in to say that everything is meaningless because the world doesn't change. The cycles of the sun, wind, and water keep going. Things go round and round, people come and go, and most of the time their life amounts to nothing. Putting aside global warming and pollution, what can an individual do to change something as vast as the oceans, the wind, or the sun? The world is like a freight train that goes around in a circle. We try to throw pebbles at it, but we can do nothing to change its course. Nothing changes. There is nothing new under the sun. So many times we think we have novel ideas, but how often are they truly novel? Those who actually change the world are few and far between. Most of us won't make a difference. Even Solomon, with all his power and wealth couldn't build a lasting kingdom. Just one generation after Solomon, Israel was divided into two kingdoms.

Not only is the world going in a circle, but it is spiraling down at the same time, towards destruction. We pursue that which does not fulfill, and time passes. Every minute we are a minute closer to death. While we have time, we should use this time in a worthwhile manner. Solomon summarizes things in v. 8, saying all things are wearisome. After seeing it all, that's what he can conclude. But he will not get to the punchline until much later on. If everything here is meaningless, then what do we pursue? But we already know the punchline, that there is nothing of more worth than to know God. We must have the proper perspective and the right priorities. There are good things to enjoy in this world, like family, career, or hobbies; but they are *hevel*. If you put them first and pursue them instead of God, you will come to a dead end and everything you did will have been in vain because these things don't last. Let us take stock in what Solomon says, and reorient our lives.