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**So...What's the Point?
Ecclesiastes 1**

A six year old boy asked his mother the question every little boy or girl eventually asks, "What did I come from?". Mom swallowed hard, said a quick silent prayer and led the boy to the couch in the living room and explained as simply and completely as she could the entire reproductive process. When she finished her explanation, she relaxed back into the sofa hoping for some feedback as to how well she had communicated these deep and glorious truths about where we all have come from. After a moment of questioning silence, the little boy said, "That's very strange mom... my friend Jimmy says he came from Chicago."

Have you ever answered the wrong question? I think far too often the church is answering questions that nobody is asking. We may think we have a lot of great answers, but what if they are answers to questions that no one is asking? The last few weeks we have been providing answers that a lot of people are asking after reading the book or watching the movie "Da Vinci code". We have answered the questions that people are asking around the water cooler at work. Where did our Bible come from? Was Jesus married? Did Jesus ever claim to be the son of God? What does the Bible really say about women? Answers given to questions people ask. This morning we begin our six week series from the book of Ecclesiastes. Its our "So...whats the point" series. I could call it our "what a waste series". I could call it "where can I find meaning" series. Or just to make all the English teachers cringe, I could call it our "I can't get no satisfaction" series. The guy who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes looked at life, observed the way life works in a very realistic even critical or pessimistic perspective apart from considering God. He brought up a whole lot of questions people are asking. Those questions

that come from his observation of life are very important and we are going to explore some of them in our series.

The book of Ecclesiastes is really a journal of sorts written by a guy who went looking for satisfaction. Just like the Rolling Stones famous song, "He tried and he tried and he tried but he just can't get no satisfaction." He is asking the questions, "what's the point? Where can I find meaning to life? Where is there something that will give me the lasting satisfaction and significance and purpose that lasts?"

The writer of this seeker journal writes from the perspective that the world is all there is. He writes about what life would be like if you build a dome, like an Astro dome, over the top of the world and were able to block God out. What would the world be like without any intervention, no supernatural, no heavenly reward, no forgiveness, grace, no eternity. This is what he refers to as living "under the sun". That phrase, "under the sun" is repeated 29 times in the book. That is used simply to describe what life is like if the heavens were shut off from man.

Because of that perspective the author writes from, Ecclesiastes is one of the most quoted Bible books by Atheists and humanists. They like the passages that seem to infer there is no life after death. The pleasure hounds like this book because certain verses encourage the reader to "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we must die." Parts of the book read like a beer commercial. Go for the gusto! Live it up now, for this is as good as it gets. So its important to look at the whole message of the book and not just drag a couple of sound bites out of context. A simple paraphrase of the book might be, Chapter one, "I tried it all and all of it is empty and worthless." Chapters 2-12 "here is a list of what I tried, I've wrote it all down in order to save you the trouble." And sprinkled through the book and strongly at the end there is the message of truth; there is only one way to find any sort of meaning and ultimate purpose in life.

What, you may ask is this kind of book doing in the Bible? Why is this book considered an inspired and accurate book, delivered down to

us by Almighty God? Why was this written? There are a number of reasons. I think the writer wants us to learn from his pain on his dime so that we don't get to the end of our lives and find ourselves shriveled and wracked with hopelessness and cynicism, and staring back on a wasted life. I was the youngest of five children and I observed the mistakes the older ones made and several times I learned from what they tried and said, "nope, I'm not going to try that, that is a dead end road, that choice is a waste of time, that one leads you no where." I made plenty of bad choices that I had to learn on my own, but the writer of this book wants us to minimize those mistakes and learn instead from his.

This book is a wake up call for someone who, just like the author, has walked away from God. This book is a wake up call for someone who has been given all the advantages of life, Godly upbringing, intelligence, wit, humor, money, power, great looks, but still stubbornly is committed to learn life from the school of hard knocks. The guy who wrote this is saying, "Save yourself the pain, save yourself the trouble. Don't waste all the years that I did spitting into the wind." It's a wake up call to someone who has an empty heart. Someone who has been successful at playing all the worlds games and owns all the worlds toys and trophies and has gathered them all in only to discover they are all empty and don't satisfy. This book is a wake up call to someone who has not succeeded, and never won at the worlds game of power, money, talent, beauty or fame and still is continuing to pursue those things thinking that if only I had those things then I would find satisfaction, purpose and meaning in life. This book is a wake up call for those who are not sharp enough to see the futility and waste of striving to do life apart from God. Those who are doing life spinning out in the mud and fail to see that they are getting no where and flinging a whole lot of mud on a lot of people around them. This book does not offer a whole list of tips and tricks to achieve this kind of lasting satisfaction, it simply raises a whole lot of questions, eliminates a ton of dead-ends and eventually

points us in the right direction. This book was written to open the eyes of those of us who have forgotten what life without God looks like. The author doesn't talk a whole lot about God, he leaves that to the other 65 books in the Bible. The author sees his task as exposing, and revealing our complete inability to find meaning in life on our own. He wants us to stop our futile attempts to make something out of life apart from God and instead give our full attention to God and enjoy the gifts that He has given for us, as gifts. Ecclesiastes is not meant to be a hearty meal, its meant more to be a cold bath, a wake up call that ought to prompt us to forget our arrogance and know-it-all answers enough to see life in reality as it really is.

So who is this guy who wrote Ecclesiastes? Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes. Turn to the middle of your Bible you will find Psalms then go right Proverbs, then Ecclesiastes. The translators refer to the author as the "Preacher", and that is misleading in our current world. We hear that and think of a guy standing up in front of a congregation in a church and expounding on the Word of God. That is probably not the best rendering of the Hebrew title for the book is Qoheleth. That word means one who gathers, assembles together or collects things. This makes sense for one who has observed life with a searching mind and collected summaries of his observations. A better name for the author of this book is to call him a searcher or seeker or gatherer. He is not really a proclaimer or preacher of truth but rather a searcher, an observer and questioner as he looks around at life as he sees it.

Ecc. 1 The author is the son of David, and a king in Jerusalem. There were several men who were kings and sons of David, but this is most likely referring to Solomon. Especially when we read about the power and wealth and wisdom and resources this guy had...we can be pretty sure that this guy who went looking for satisfaction was Solomon. Above all others he had the ability to search, the time, the wisdom, the

wealth, the power. He had every advantage including a godly father, who wasn't perfect but did follow after God's own heart. Jewish tradition suggests that Solomon wrote the book "song of Solomon" in his early years. He wrote Proverbs in His middle years and wrote Ecclesiastes in his later years, perhaps the fact that he even wrote it was an expression of his regret for all the wasted years of folly and not following God. Ecclesiastes is different from Proverbs in that Proverbs highlights the value of living in the fear and obedience of God's truth, Ecclesiastes highlights the inability of human effort to find ultimate satisfaction and value apart from God.

Solomon has tried it all and nothing satisfies the cravings of his heart. Solomon does not keep his conclusions hidden from us. Right up front after the introduction in v.1 we read, "Vanities of vanities, repeated again. Its all vanity." He is not referring to pride in ones appearance or talent standing in front of a mirror. He is simply saying its all empty, its all meaningless. It is all worthless. And he doubly repeats "vanity" for emphasis. His emphasis is not needed though as he is very clear what degree of emptiness he observes in life.

Was this the way Solomon's life started out? Lets take a look back. I Kings 2. His father King David is on his deathbed. David has some final words of wisdom to pass on to his son, Solomon. V.2 "I am going the way of the earth, (I am dying). So Be strong, show yourself a man. (This is what David says real strength and a real man looks like) v.3 "Keep the charge of the Lord your God and walk in His ways...that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn." Son, if you want to succeed in life, this is the key "Obey God, follow God's truth." That is the way to being a real man, a strong man.

In chapter 3 of I Kings we read of Solomon doing just that. Almost like a genie in a bottle, God appears to Solomon in a dream and says, "Ask anything you wish me to give you." If I were Solomon, I might of asked for a thousand more wishes, but Solomon answered even better,

“v.9 “give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people and to discern between good and evil. Literally Solomon asks for a “hearing heart that listens to God’s voice.” He asks for wisdom to apply God’s truth to life, and God gave him that and added to it wealth and power. Solomon had such a great and promising start. It says in I Kings 3:3 “Solomon loved the lord walked in the ways of his father...except v.3 he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. Exceptions, cultural sins, compromises will pull us down. Even though Solomon loved God, there were cracks in his armor. Later in life those cracks would split and grow and multiply as he was drawn away from God’s heart by over 700 wives and 300 concubines. Whatever he wanted he took, sex, drugs alcohols, building projects, lavish gardens, parks, wealth upon wealth. Yachts, horses, He made Bill Gates look like a pauper. He discovered it all was empty, meaningless, vanity, nothing. It took Solomon a lifetime to figure out that what his dad said to Him was correct and he then began to follow God again.

Frederick Buechner summaries Solomons point when he writes, “If you decide to knock yourself out getting rich and living up to it, Solomon points out all you have to show for it in the end is the biggest income tax in town and a bad liver; and when you finally kick the bucket, the chances are that your dim-witted heirs will sink the whole thing in a phony Florida real estate deal or lose it at the track in Saratoga. If you decide to break your back getting a decent education and end up a Columbia Ph.D. and an advisor to Presidents, you’ll be just as dead when the time comes as the high school drop-out who went into sausage stuffing, and you’ll be forgotten just about as soon.”

There is no predictability in life. Unless God breaks in and tells us what is going on, it’s a roll of the dice. Its all futile. All the work and effort you do is futile. Good things and bad things happen to people and there seems to be little correlation, little justice, little that makes sense. READ (v.3-11)

In v.3 of Ecclesiastes Solomon declares “what advantage does man have in all his work which he does “under the sun”? If ones life is lived apart from God and with only the “under the sun”, on earth perspective, work is meaningless. Work was God’s idea. God modeled work way back when the world was created in Genesis one. God worked and created and stepped back and reflected saying, “it was good”. God liked what he did. We are created to work. I Timothy 5:8 call us to work to provide for our families. There is great value and dignity in work. The united states is one of the most creative, driven and innovative work forces in the world. We work smarter and harder and our ability to produce is amazing...and yet of all the developed nations we are one of the least happy. We produce at amazing performance levels, but it does not produce a deep lasting satisfaction and happiness. Apart from God, work is stripped of its meaning.

In v.5,6,7 the Searcher, Solomon describes the cycles of life that he observes. V. 4 a generation comes and goes, but the earth remains forever. I was born and in another 40 years I will die and be largely forgotten. My sons will die another 30 years after that and their sons will die. Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains the same. Some of those redwood trees will live for several thousand years. Even the doug fir trees in my backyard will probably far outlast me unless someone chops them down. We tend to think that we should last longer then we do, but we die. There seems to be something wrong with this picture say Solomon. Isn’t man the crowning glory or creation and have dominion over all creation? Shouldn’t we last longer then a turtle or a sturgeon? Apart from God, living only “under the sun” that is a desperate situation. Death is coming whether you like it or not. Woody Allen said, “I’m not afraid of death...I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

Moses was a leader who spent 40 years wandering around in the desert with several million people waiting and watching the entire

generation die. He wrote in Psalm 90 “Thou dost turn man back into dust and say “return o children of men, for a thousand years in thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. Like grasses that sprouts up new in the morning but toward evening it fades and withers away. As for the days of our life they contain 70 years or if do to strength you might get 80. So teach us to number our days that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.” A life that is lived apart from God makes the sting of death terrifyingly painful and wasted and meaningless.

V.5 the cycles of the sun rising up and going down. The Hebrew word used for “hastening to its place it t rises again” is the actual word for “panting”. The author wants to paint the picture of a sun that is out of breath from races up to get into the sky in the morning an then getting back into its place at night. V.6 The cycles of the wind in giant circles above the earth blowing north and west and east. This is unusual because we have no evidence that they understood this as a fact about the wind. We can watch on TV and see from the satellite picture that the wind moves in great circles in the sky, but how did Solomon know this? V. 7 the evaporation cycle of rain and rivers and water into the sea and then back up into the clouds again, the oceans never tired of filling and flowing.

Have you ever been frustrated by the endless cycle of life? The never ending mound of laundry that keeps appearing every week and is never satisfied? The grass that keeps growing, you cut it only to have your beautiful job undone by the end of the week. No matter how hard you work and how diligent you are, the weeds that you pulled from your strawberry patch just last week, come back seemingly with even greater strength.

v. 8 “all things are wearisome. The eye is never satisfied with seeing and the ear will never get filled with hearing. Even ice cream if you have it everyday gets old. Last year I was getting a pizza at Papa Murphys

and asked the workers if they got free pizza? Yeah they said, but I have worked here for over a year and I can't stand to eat it anymore. They tired and they tired and they tried, but they just can't get no satisfaction.,

V. 9-10 even creating something, innovating or achieving gets old. "That which has been done is that which will be done, there is nothing new under the sun. Someone might say, "see this, it is new, already it has existed for ages." What looks like great advancement gives way to boredom. Its all the same. Its like that movie "Ground-hogs Days" with Bill Murray. Every day he wakes up is the same day he keeps reliving it over and over again. No hope for change. Weapons change, faces changes, the events that start the conflict change, the nationalities change, but nothing driving the real core of conflict changes, the results stay the same. We may find a cure for polio but ten other diseases pop up that we can't cure. Each generation may get really pumped up that this is the generation that is going to make a difference and change the world. This is the generation that is going to bring about world peace. This is the generation that is going to clean up the environment and get rid of hate crimes and racism and feed all of Africa and cure the AID's epidemic. But generations come and generations go. That which has been is that which will be. V.11 no one will learn from the past. History will repeat itself and we will be none the wiser. Pretty cheery outlook in life isn't it? Makes you want to crawl in a cave and go to sleep for about 50 years. But that is what life looks like when lived "under the sun", lived here on earth apart from God.

I really hate to leave us here this morning in such a sad place. It would probably be good for me to have us feel the heavy weight of our desperate situation without God, but let me give you a window of hope.

While Solomon lifts up a lot of questions for us to ponder. While Solomon's task is to realize our desperate condition and make us long for something of lasting value and worth. There is one answer. In fact, God

provided that answer through his son Jesus Christ. If you have been searching for meaning I want you to know before you walk out that door that meaning is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ that lasts far beyond this lifetime. It's a relationship that last forever. So many people walk through life feeling devoid of purpose and so very alone. Jesus has promised to always be with us. Jesus broke the dismal circle of life and death and life and death when he rose from the dead. He broke the power of death and in doing so also broke the power of sin and set us free. Our hope, our purpose, our significance is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He broke out of death and brought life and meaning to a endless circle of vanity. He broke purpose and even beauty to the endless circles of our life. Jesus is the answer for the world today above there is no other Jesus is the way. It is in Jesus that we can rise above living "under the sun" and see the eternal destiny that awaits us and fills us with hope for living right now. If God didn't step in and do something for us we would be in terrible, wasteful, situation. But God does care. God does notice and He wants to break through to you and breathe life and hope and joy into your life. There is no other answer. Won't you say yet to Jesus today?