

2-19-23 Sermon #7 Meaning of life

We've been looking at different characteristics of God, and I hope you've pondered how much they affect your walk through life. Being able to have laughter and joy is a gift to all of us from God. If God is telling us to "Eat, drink, and be merry" that sounds strange.

Last Wednesday we started the study of Ecclesiastes, and one of the main reasons Ecclesiastes is my favorite book, is because of how much it taught me about the "Meaning of Life".

I don't know about all of you but, for many years, at times, I felt like all roads just led to hollow endings. When I started reading Ecclesiastes, it really spoke to me. As we go through life, we try to do everything we can to reach new accomplishments, and we continually see things get improved upon. We don't ever seem to get enough, and we continually try to get something new or find that new accomplish. From a practical sense, I'll use people's occupations.

This includes all the stay-at-home parents. Devoting themselves to serving isn't easy. We all have to start at an entry-level position, and we're constantly trying to advance in knowledge. As we get better at our jobs, we expect increases in pay, and we want others to acknowledge our status.

When my dad was in the work force, people used to stay with a company until retirement. Now, people change companies, on average, every three years. Advancing and gaining status is important to us and we naturally pursue that.

We can also see this with our hobbies. We continually accumulate more equipment, we increase in skill level, and we continually try to find more pleasure from them. We never reach perfection, but we don't stop pursuing it.

We never seem to find complete satisfaction.

Last Wednesday we started the study of Ecclesiastes. We started by defining Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:

1 The words of the Teacher,^[a] son of David, king in Jerusalem: ²“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

The words meaningless or vanity doesn't mean they're a waste of time. In Ecclesiastes, whenever we see the words meaningless or vanity, we need to replace them with "Apart from God". We need to understand that it isn't saying that nothing is important. It's saying that without God, we can't find any true meaning or satisfaction in what we do. Solomon is telling us that how we go about life is meaningless without God in it. God wants all of us to have joy, happiness, and peace. This is why He gives us gifts. Our gifts are what bring us the most joy in our lives. Understanding that God wants us to be in relationship with Him is hard for people to comprehend. In chapter 1:3-11 it describes just how vast or big of a God we serve is:

What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? ⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun rises and the sun sets,

and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. ¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

We need to understand that we’re only here for a short time, and after our life ends, that’s what truly matters. God is in control, and He’s more powerful than any man. When we chose to include God in all things, we find tremendous meaning for life. When we do things alone or by ourselves, we’ll never find complete peace. We’re never satisfied and we’re continually “chasing after the wind” while under the sun. One study showed that all human beings generate 70,000 thoughts in a day, and 85% of those are negative. Without God, our thoughts are what crush our Spirit. Most people have experienced times in life that can feel like nothing really matters. We can relate to feeling like were a hamster running on a hamster wheel. We go round and round, and we can feel like we’re not getting anywhere. Another illustration I like is that it’s like we’re trying to fill a bathtub without putting the drain plug in. The most difficult times for finding peace are when we get life’s trials and face losses. They suck the life out of us, and when we experience them, which we all do, they sting really bad.

I included Ecclesiastes 3 (A time for everything) in the bulletin:

3 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: ² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, ⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, ⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, ⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, ⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, ⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

These are God’s words and their reality. The musical group The Byrds wrote the song “Turn, Turn, Turn” with these words as lyrics. Through Solomon’s experiences God is trying to give us good advice. We don’t have to accept it, but we will never be able to change the fact that it’s true. Also, knowing and accepting the truth about Adam and Eve’s fall, is why we have to experience the knowledge of good and evil, “under the sun”. We look at all the evil going on around us and act like it’s new. We need to understand that we will never win the battle of evil in this world, and living “apart from God”, or “depending on ourselves”, prevents us from making sense of this world.

The book of Ecclesiastes is God’s way of giving us wisdom and advice through Solomon’s life.

Solomon sought every pleasure imaginable and achieved them. When we were growing up, we thought our parents were pretty stupid, but as we got older, we came to realize that they're actually quite smart. Their teachings come from experience. In life, we all have to choose whether we live "apart from God" or "dependent on God".

I've met a number of people who really struggle with their identity when they retire or when they become empty nesters. We use our skills to form our identity and that's what we used to share with others. Our career is the most common form of identity, and when we no longer have it, it can make us feel less important. This never happens when our life is committed to walking with God in all things. When I asked us to answer the question; "Who is this Jesus?" and "Who am I?", I hope you spent some time thinking about it.

Now, I'd like to ask; "What is the meaning of life for you?" Once you answer that, I challenge you to ask yourself if your answer is only intellectual, or do you actually live it out?

This is very important.

Solomon was considered the wisest man of that time, and throughout Ecclesiastes he illustrates just how empty his life was without God in it. He had everything. He had wealth, wisdom, women, possessions, and power. Whatever he desired he got. After every accomplishment, He just kept describing it as vanity and meaningless.

He pursued them apart from God.

The words "meaningless" or "vanity" are used 30 times in the book. "Chasing after the wind" is used 29 times, and "under the sun" is repeatedly used. Solomon describes the end times under the sun this way – It doesn't matter if you're a fool or wise, from dust we came, and to dust we return.

In 9:1-3 it describes a common destiny for all:

9 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. ² All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad,^[a] the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. ³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun:

"Under the sun" means "in the world":

The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

"Without God" we're completely subject to Satan and our eternity is in Hell. The desire to put God in the highest place in our lives is what fills all voids.

In Ecclesiastes 3:9-14 it says,

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

With God, we can have what Adam and Eve had before the fall. Picture that, hold onto it, see how much joy they had. God is in all people's hearts and through Jesus we get the purity that God wants for us during this lifetime. He just wants us to be in relationship with Him. Placing our citizenship in Heaven is what God desires. This world will eat us alive but, we don't have to live that way.

Last Friday, I was talking to a young man, and he was explaining that it's been a long time since he's been at church. He explained that his friends are all believers, but you wouldn't be able to tell by how they live their lives. Many people say this same thing about other people, and our negative thoughts or worldly thoughts make us feel this way. When we watch others do things against God and then hear them say they're Christians, it doesn't add up.

If we only looked in the mirror and asked that same question of ourselves, would we say that we're not Christians?

Jesus died so that all can be cleansed. Through Christ, we can live life and live it abundantly.

Instead of 85% of our thoughts being negative, allowing God to be a part of all things can help with changing that. Through Christ, we have the Holy Spirit to help us. The "meaning of life" is about coming to Christ and allowing Him to guide our steps. Praying in all things can be viewed as a command, or it can be seen as a privilege. Prayer is how we find true happiness, and that is only possible if we depend on God. Relying on Christ isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of redemption, and it makes us just like Adam and Eve before the fall. Christ death, burial, and resurrection restored each and every one of us. With God, we get to experience a life that is full of blessings and full of joy. Through Christ we get to see Heaven. Eternity is in our hearts, and being in heaven is what children of God get to claim. We bring nothing into this life, and the faster we let God into all things, from that point on we get to hold onto the hope of the ultimate satisfaction. "Heaven!"

God is very real!!!

We live on this side of the cross, and it's only the gift of the Holy Spirit that allows us to know the gift of God's LOVE.

I like to view the Holy Spirit as God's DNA living in us.

Let's pray.