



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

18 – What Does He Mean?

Announcements:

5/22 @7:30 -

Prayer

5/23 @6:30 -

Grace Group

5/26 -During Service

Baptism

5/26 @8:30 -

Sunday School

5/26 @6:00 -

Family Night

ICE BREAKER: Have you ever said something that just “came out wrong”?

READ: Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

I mentioned on Sunday that this was the beginning of the “better” part of Ecclesiastes. In other words, It is in this section that we finally move past the (really) depressing thoughts and get some sort of Solomon’s positive views on a whole host of different topics. But some people would not agree with me on that statement. In particular there is a problematic thought at the end of what we just read. Solomon says “for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom is Sheol, *to which you are going.*” So today I would like to dive into that thought and look at The context of the whole book of Ecclesiastes, to see how we can see the thought that we are all headed towards Sheol (the afterlife, or simply death)!

To start, I want to share from one of my commentaries that strongly thinks that this particular passage shows that Solomon is *not* done wallowing. “The list of things absent after death, *actions, thought, knowledge, and wisdom*, suggest both physical and mental processes coming to a complete end. For Qohelet [Solomon] death is the absolute end. We see that “under the sun” entails the entirety of human possibility; it is no wonder that ultimate meaning eluded him.” (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament). In other words, as this commentator reads this passage he sees more and more of pointless vanity. You’re all just going to die, and then there is nothing! And if he is right in reading the passage this way, then I am wrong in saying the depressing thoughts are over! So how can we land on such a different spot? The answer comes in how we have been reading the *entire* book of Ecclesiastes.

I have mentioned a couple of times that there are really two camps in understanding the way that we read the entire book of Ecclesiastes. The first (and the one that the above commentator holds to) is that the first 11 and a half books of Ecclesiastes are showing us what life apart from God looks like. It is depressing, there is nothing, it is all vain. Because God gives the meaning, God gives the value, God gives all the color and good things. And so, they say, Solomon is putting himself in their shoes for the bulk of the book so that he can show them how dumb (my word... but it gets the point across) life without God would be. We can know that this is the way that he reads this passage because he says “for Solomon [we can read here, Solomon -- in the part he is playing] death is the absolute end.”

The second camp (and the one that I hold to) is that Solomon wants us all to see that while life is painful and difficult for all people, we can still find truth and value and goodness in (and sometimes because of!) the vanity, because it is God who sends and allows and uses the vanity. Death is not the end, far from it, death is something to look forward to (see last week and the thought that our hope is in knowing that we will die), because it is ultimately how we get out from under the sun” and into the glory of heaven. It is here that we can see what Solomon is *really* saying here.

The best way to read this verse is to understand that Solomon is being poetic and even exaggerating to prove a point. What is that point? That life is short, and so we should enjoy life under the sun as long as we can. Go eat your bread, because you don’t know how many more bread eating days you have. Let your garments be white, because death is creeping up and we don’t know how long we have to wear those nice things. Enjoy your life with your wife (or husband!) because there is something that is creeping up and God may take one or both of you... Then you will not be able to enjoy the wisdom and goodness and thoughts, etc of these things. Solomon is not making some theological point about the nature of the afterlife, rather he is making a practical point about the nature of *this* life. Here a more pleasant point than others he has been making: Have joy in this difficult life!

DISCUSS:

1. In what ways can we enjoy life here “under the sun”? In what ways should we be very careful?
2. In what ways does knowing the brevity of life and final-ness of life impact our joy today? (for better and worse)
3. How can Solomon’s thoughts here help us to better proclaim the Gospel? (In other words, how does the life death and resurrection of Jesus impact how we read and share this passage)