WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Ecclesiastes 2.24-26

We are continuing a series on the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. Contrary to modern understandings, wisdom has a divine origin, not a human one. As we read wisdom literature, we can easily get the mistaken impression that wisdom involves the memorization and application of certain texts. The fact is, wisdom is not just common sense based upon experience, it is a result of a relationship with God.

13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.
14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12.13-14

The writer of Ecclesiastes believed that his book was an argument that came to a close in 12.13-14. Therefore, we are able to fairly conclude, that each of the four sections, (1.2-2.26; 3.1-5.20; 6.1-8.15; 8.16-12.14), added something to the progress of that argument. Therefore, the best way to understand where the author is headed is to look at the conclusion of each section. If we can understand the conclusion, we might then be able to follow with greater certainty the steps leading up to it.

24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God,
25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?
26 To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 2.24-26

With a proper understanding of this passage, two principles can be established.

1. The possession of the blessings and “goods” of life is a gift from God.

2. Men and women definitely do not have it within their ability to extract enjoyment from life or from any of its most mundane functions. Only God can give that ability to those who come to him in faith.

The writer of Ecclesiastes asks a rhetorical question; and what a great question it is:

What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? Ecclesiastes 2.22

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Mark 8.36

These are questions that weigh heavily on the hearts of men. As one looks at the world in which we find ourselves, we can make some observations about life:

1. Life seems so temporary (Ecclesiastes 1.2-4).

2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.
“Utterly meaningless!”

3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?
4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever. Ecclesiastes 1.2-4
2. Life seems tiresome (Ecclesiastes 1.5-8).

5 The 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. Ecclesiastes 1.5-8

3. Life seems un-fulfilling (Ecclesiastes 1.9-10).

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. Ecclesiastes 1.9-10

4. Life seems insignificant (Ecclesiastes 1.11).

11 There is no remembrance of men of old,
and even those who are yet to come
will not be remembered
by those who follow. Ecclesiastes 1.11

5. Life seems uncontrollable (Ecclesiastes 1.12-15).

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

15 What is twisted cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted. Ecclesiastes 1.12-15

Solomon comes to the conclusion in Chapter 1 that if you don’t know the purpose of life, (1.14) it’s just all senseless or transient. When you don’t know the point of life, you have some options.

However, from God’s perspective, the purpose of life is relatively clear:

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. Ephesians 1.4-8

36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22.36-40