HOW CAN I BE TRULY HAPPY?
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 [There is not a good in man that he is able] 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

In our study of Ecclesiastes, it is helpful to see the word translated “meaningless” (NIV) in a possible different light.

“Utterly meaningless!” “The merest of breaths!”
"Everything is meaningless.” "Everything is a breath.” Ecclesiastes 1.2

Job 7.7; Psalm 39.4-6, 11; 144.4; Proverbs 31.30

The Teacher throughout Ecclesiastes asks the same question (with slightly different emphasis):

What does man gain from all his labor
   at which he toils under the sun? Ecclesiastes 1.3; 2.22; 3.9, 22; 5.16-17

So what is the use then for what we do “under the sun”? What do men achieve for all their sweat, worry, and stress? What then is life? Is it merely the dreary rhythm of ceaseless activity? What is left for man for his trouble?

Solomon plunges enthusiastically into the investigation in his search to answer these and other questions.

1. The Pleasures of Life are Tested, Ecclesiastes 1.12-2.11

   I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” Ecclesiastes 2.1

   I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
   I refused my heart no pleasure. Ecclesiastes 2.10
2. The Purposes of Life are Examined, Ecclesiastes 2.12-23

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. Ecclesiastes 2.12

3. From Despair to Satisfaction, Ecclesiastes 2.24-26

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What do you do when everything you’ve ever wanted is not enough? Why is Ecclesiastes included in our Scriptures? I do think God is trying to teach us that here are some dead ends we can avoid. Save your time, save your money – real happiness is not found in these things. True happiness, true meaning in life, true wealth, comes from a relationship with God.

Solomon’s life is the life of so many in our world today: the carrying though of great projects, the building of personal monuments, the exertion of power over other human beings, the amassing of wealth, and the pursuit of pleasure. What does it add up to? From his perspective, it is “a chasing after the wind,” with the accompanying stress and anxiety, sleepless nights, and at the end – death – the ultimate auditor’s report.

Qohelet and the rest of the Bible advocate a different way of living. The biblical view of life is that it is designed to be lived in humility and obedience before God, accepting the limitations that are placed on us as moral beings and finding joy and satisfaction in the ordinary things of life.

Think about the words of Jesus, the wisest man who ever lived, as he addresses the issues related to “wisdom, knowledge and happiness.”

1 1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

2 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

3 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

4 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

5 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

6 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

7 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

8 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

9 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5.1-10

Get to know God

Trust God when life is disappointing

Expect God to meet your needs

Follow God’s instructive Word

Cultivate a loving spirit

Keep a clear conscience

Build healthy relationships

Live with an eternal perspective
