

Oct 11 Ecclesiastes 9-12

Chapter 9

Vs 1-10, The Teacher now laments the greatest evil there is, that EVERYONE ends up with the same fate- DEAD! This is the worst thing that happens under the sun. The one thing the living can be sure of is that everyone dies. Equal fates for unequal persons is the greatest absurdity, not even the most fortunate escape this. A living dog is better off than a dead lion, because the living at least are aware that death awaits them. This does not so much bring security as it does bring a sense of confidence and steadfastness. The best thing we can do in response to this grave injustice is to “eat your bread in pleasure and drink wine with a merry heart.... Wear white, let oil be abundant on your head, and enjoy life with the woman you love.” These are God’s gifts of pleasure in the midst of this absurd life. Don’t mourn and lament (wear sackcloth and ashes, abstain from sexual pleasure), but live life to the fullest extent that God allows. A man should marry a woman he loves, not simply one who brings a heavy dowry. Love should be a part of marriage, as it is an integral component for enjoying life.

Vs 11-18, Talents and merits do not necessarily ensure a carefree life. Through the absurdity of our world, misfortune befalls everyone from time to time. Wisdom is one of the most important blessings, yet if the person sharing the wisdom is not from a place of privilege and respect (ie, if they’re poor), then their wisdom is not heeded and their name is not remembered. How often is this the case even today? What wisdom do the poor have that needs to be heard in our society and in our churches?

Chapter 10

A small measure of folly can spoil a large batch of wisdom. While wisdom is more valuable, foolishness is more powerful than wisdom. A fool is visible even when he’s walking down the street because he goes astray, rather than following the well worn path. The wise in close proximity to the king should stay there and make use of their healing, pacifying power for the wellbeing of the kingdom. The Teacher views it as a great evil when fools are given positions of power and when slaves are given privileges beyond their station. He feels both of these occurrences are inappropriate and should not be so in an ordered society. Of course, today, we reject outright the practice of slavery, but he is speaking as a product of his time. The Teacher would say something to the effect of: Everything has it’s time, every person has

their role to play within an ordered society. Vs. 8-11 speak of misfortunes that may befall ordinary workers during the course of their work day, more absurdity. No one knows what will happen one day to another. The one who neglects to sharpen his axe, must use more force, and therefore is more likely to have an accident. People should use wisdom, common sense in their day to day work. Vs 12-15, wisdom is speaking graciously. Fools speak at length, and their absurd speech gets more and more absurd until it causes true damage to themselves and others. Vs 16-20, The Teacher now warns against laziness. He cannot abide lazy aristocrats who feast and get drunk in the morning, rather than in the evening in community. They shirk their duties of leadership if they are lazy and self-indulgent, and damage the country they're supposed to be leading. Moreover, the Teacher says that one's house will literally fall to ruin (roof will cave in) if the owner is lazy. Roofs in this time were flat and made of lime, which would eventually crack if not maintained. Failing to keep up with necessary repairs, failing to be diligent in administering responsibilities cause disaster.

Chapter 11

Now the Teacher turns his attention to the uncertainty of life. He says that it's important to prepare for every eventuality, because none of us know how life will turn out. Verse 1 means to protect yourself from misfortune by spreading risk around among a bunch of people, this could also refer to the idea of shipping merchandise (bread) abroad, but sending it via several ships in case one sinks. Furthermore, on a literal level, this passage simply means to share one's bread with those in need of bread, and that these acts of generosity (without expectation of return) will eventually make their way back to the giver. Furthermore, we can't worry ourselves about the weather. A farmer who is constantly worrying about the perfect weather will never get around to actually sowing and reaping. Vs. 6 God's ongoing work is not creation but governance. Just as humans cannot understand the specifics behind how God animates the fetus within the womb, so humans cannot fathom the complexities involved with God's governance of the world. Vs. 7-10, The Teacher encourages us to enjoy life to the fullest, to enjoy our youth, and to find the blessing in each and every day. He says that we should keep in mind that death is certain, and that our world is absurd, and to use those two unpleasant facts to help us appreciate each and every day of this sweet life. He says that in addition to facing life with a merry heart, that we should remove the thorns from our flesh (whatever causes unpleasantness in mind, body, or spirit).

Chapter 12

The Teacher concludes by urging us to remember God while we are still in our youth, to develop a relationship with God early in life, because it is the only way to weather the utter absurdity of this life. The Teacher sets a scene of ordinary village life, leading towards the inevitable conclusion that all of the life in that village will return to the dust, will die. Human death is compared to common items at the end of their usefulness (cord, bowl, cistern). The original book ends with verse 8 in the same way it began (this is an inclusio), “Absurdity of absurdities, all is absurdity.”

Vs 9-14, This is an epilogue, added after the original text, by an editor. The epilogue reminds the reader of the inspiring nature of wisdom, and the solid foundation it provides those who follow it. The epilogue ends with one of the most traditional refrains from Hebrew Wisdom, “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.”