

When Life Happens

Lesson for Sunday, June 9, 2024

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 4

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ Share a story of a time when something completely unexpected happened (good or bad). Talk about how that impacted your plans, how you felt with the sudden change, etc.
- ⇒ Solomon has done a great job of depressing his readers to this point. When we started in chapter 1, Solomon's viewpoint was detached and philosophical. Life is meaningless and monotonous.
- ⇒ But as he continued to question the meaning of life, he discovered that life is not always that simple. There are real people facing real situations such as life and death, time and eternity, and the final judgment.
- ⇒ In this chapter, Solomon has recorded his observations from visiting four different places and watching different people go through a variety of experiences.
- ⇒ Solomon's opinion takes a drastic shift: Life isn't nearly as monotonous as it once seemed. We have no idea what problems may come into our lives at any given moment on any given day. It reminds us a lot of Proverbs 27:1. Maybe this is where Solomon got it from!

BIBLE STUDY:

1. In the Courtroom (vs. 1-3)
 - a. Solomon started in court, watching a trial. What he saw was innocent people being oppressed by power-hungry people.
 - b. Vs. 1:
 - i. 1a: The victims wept, but their tears did no good.
 - ii. 1b: Nobody stood with them to comfort or assist them.
 - iii. 1c: The oppressors had all the power, and their victims were helpless to protest.
 - c. Vs. 2-3: Solomon was devastated by what he saw to the point that he concludes it is better to be dead than to be alive and oppressed. In fact, one was better off never having been born at all!
 - d. This is a common problem today in our culture. The author Edward Gibbon wrote, "Political corruption is the most infallible symptom of constitutional liberty." Where there is freedom to obey, there is freedom to disobey.
 - e. DISCUSS: Where do we see political and judicial corruption today? Where do we see people mistreated and oppressed? Try to keep this on a local level!
2. In the Marketplace (vs. 4-8)
 - a. The king now heads to the market to watch various laborers at work. He comes across four different types of men...
 - b. First is the industrious man (vs. 4). This man is working hard and has mastered his trade.
 - i. But what about his heart? The only reason this worker works so hard was to compete with others and make more money than the rest.
 - ii. Work is a gift from God, but He did not put the "selfish factor" into it. That's the result of man's sinful heart.
 - iii. While competition is not necessarily a sin, it can become sin when "being first" is more important than being honest.
 - c. Second is the idle man (vs. 5-6): This man is the opposite of the first – no ambition at all.
 - i. Solomon already knew all about the lazy man: laziness is a slow, comfortable path toward self-destruction (Prov. 6:10-11; 2 Thess. 3:10).
 - ii. The idle man is motivated by pleasure and is headed to doom.
 - d. Third is the integrated man (vs. 6): Here is the man whose life is balanced.
 - i. This man enjoys both his labor and his rest.

- ii. This is the opposite of how so many of us live today. Ask anyone and they will describe themselves as either busy or tired.
 - iii. We easily get sucked into the rat race chasing the American Dream with no clue how to escape.
 - iv. What should the goal of the Christian be? See 1 Timothy 6:6.
 - e. Fourth is the independent man (vs. 7-8):
 - i. He has no partners and desires no help. He wants all the profit for himself.
 - ii. But he is so busy, he has no time to enjoy the profits he makes. He has no family left to inherit his wealth.
 - iii. In other words, all of his labor was in vain.
 - f. Solomon's conclusion: This, too, is meaningless (vs. 8). God wants us to work hard, but to work with the right spirit and for the right reasons. Blessed are the balanced!
- 3. On the Highway (vs. 9-12)
 - a. Solomon now considers the importance of friendship and the value of doing things together.
 - b. Vs. 5: Two are better than one when it comes to working, because two workers can get more done.
 - c. Vs. 6: Two are better than one when it comes to walking. How wonderful to have friend that can help you when we fall physically. How much more when we fall spiritually?
 - d. Vs. 7: Two are better than one when it comes to warmth. Two can carry extra blankets!
 - e. Vs. 8: Two are better than one when it comes to watchcare, especially at night. It's dangerous for anyone to travel alone.
 - f. Solomon started with the number one (vs 8), then moved to two (vs. 9), and then closed with three (vs. 12). If two is better than one, then three will fare even better!
 - g. Who is the friend you can all in the middle of the night and you know they will answer? What qualities should we look for in good friends?
- 4. In the Palace (vs. 13-16)
 - a. In verses 13-16 Solomon tells a story. For a class exercise, have the class read verses 13-14 and determine what Solomon is teaching us. Some ideas...
 - i. Wealth and position are no guarantee of success...
 - ii. Poverty and seeming failure are no barriers to achievement...
 - b. Then read verses 15-16. It looked like the young king had made it, but his fame did not last. A new crowd came up, got rid of him and put someone else in charge.
 - c. Solomon ends where he has been throughout: It is all vanity and vexation of spirit.

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION:

- ⇒ In light of all this, what are we to do? Pay attention! Solomon has been dropping hints throughout these first few chapters. Consider...
 - When we look up, God is in control and He balances life's varied experiences (3:1-8).
 - When we look within, we see that man is made for more than this temporary life – he is made for eternity and God will make all things beautiful in their time (3:9-14).
 - When we look ahead, we see the last enemy, death.
 - When we look around (ch. 4), we understand that life is complex, difficult, and not always easy to explain.
 - One thing is for sure: Wherever we look, we see trials and problems and people who could use some encouragement. So, think through these applications...
- ⇒ Point 1: Where do we see injustices in our area today? How should we be responding?
 - Our Goal: Look to comfort those in need.
- ⇒ Point 2: Is our life balanced? How would we know?
 - Our Goal: Live a balanced life – Godliness with contentment.
- ⇒ Point 3: How involved are you with others? This is a great opportunity to discuss the importance of Sunday School!
 - Our Goal: Look for opportunities to work with others.