

NOTES FOR WEEK OF FEB 27

Meaning (less)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4:16

“The Human Dilemma”

A few weeks ago, I challenged us using a simple two-story house diagram created by Will Mancini. Using that illustration I asked the question, “Are you a first floor or a second-floor church member?” Second floor members are those who have embraced the mission of the church, the Great Commission of Jesus to take the Gospel to the world and make disciples.

The purpose of this study we are in is to give you a different way to look at what we do here on Sundays...we want to equip you, to resource you to make disciples where you live, and work and play. So, as you listen today, you need to listen not just to “get” a message, but ask, “How can I take the truth of the Bible into my world?” There are some additional resources online at fruitcove.com to help you do that.

So, we are in a series called “Meaningless.” Now that doesn’t mean the series is meaningless. It is a way of presenting the message of Ecclesiastes to our world today, a world that denies that God exists. A world that sees life as devoid of meaning. Solomon is taking us on a journey into that world. It’s not an easy study, but it’s an important one.

I wonder who in here today would say, “I’ve got plenty of time to do all the things I need to do. I’m never stressed about time. There’s always just enough.” Anybody? I doubted it. You know we’re not always honest with each other or ourselves about time. How many times have you said, “I’m sorry, I just didn’t have time to do that,” when the more honest answer is, “I’m sorry I chose not to call you back because I chose to spend my time differently.” So at least you know if someone says, “I didn’t have time,” they had just as much time as the president. Just as much time as a surgeon. Just as much time as a composer or author. Same 24 for everybody. They just didn’t invest their time wisely or chose not to invest it with you!

One of the places that most people express frustration or dissatisfaction with life is knowing our time is limited. We have expiration dates. The Bible tells us “three score and ten” a total of 70 years. On average, that’s about right. My father-in-law lived to be well over 90 but he would remind us often that we were never promised more than “threescore and ten.”

Time flies. Whether you’re a king or a truck driver, a young person starting out in life (think about how fast spring and summer break used to feel) ...unless you’re the parent. Then it feels like eternity unfolding.

But time is something that is in God’s control, not ours. That’s the first reality we encounter in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3. The ticking of the clock. The passing of the seconds and the days and months and years. In a Psalm written by Moses, we read “...teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” But eternity doesn’t run on a clock.

Wisdom takes time seriously. Wisdom requires us to understand that we live life on loan. We ultimately can't control how many minutes or days our lives will be. We just know that, at a day set by God, we'll spend our last second on earth. "Teach us to number..." Or as Solomon puts it in our text, "There's a time to be born, and a time to die." We had no control over our entrance into the world. We will have no control over our exit.

But right here is where we encounter:

The Source of Our Dissatisfaction: God is eternal

He has placed eternity in our hearts. What that means, simply put, is that God is in control of that most precious commodity in our lives: Time. The one thing we all share in common is that an hour is an hour. It's not 36 minutes to one person and 60 to another. A day is 24 hours. And the other thing we get is we have a choice how to spend that time...or waste it.

At this stage of my life, I would really like to have some of those wasted hours and days back for a do-over. But while with hard work or just being smart we can make up money we've wasted, we can't make up time with our families...or time we could have spent walking with the Lord instead of wandering in the world. No do overs exist.

But here's some good news this morning. "God has set eternity in our hearts." We were made to yearn for something that transcends the clock and the calendar. We were made to enjoy eternal things. Our dissatisfaction comes because of this. You see, if we only live "under the sun," we try to make the pleasures and joys of a fallen, temporary world have eternal significance. They can't. I know I have an eternity of time awaiting. It takes the sting out of not having enough time now.

Every pleasure you enjoy, every joyful moment with your spouse, or your children, or looking at a beautiful landscape or work of art...all of it is destined to lead to dissatisfaction unless you know that, with those things God is just hinting at what's waiting for us in eternity. When we focus on the things of this earth as our ultimate reality and our ultimate enjoyment, we make our ultimate meaning about that relationship or that possession or that experience.

God goes to great lengths to remind us that our time here is limited. How we use our time will be something we'll be called to account for. "...God will call the past to account." If we invest it with a view toward eternity, it's something for which we will be rewarded!

Our dissatisfaction comes when we forget that it is God Who gives us the time we enjoy. We need to invest it wisely. "God makes everything beautiful in its time," if we can see God's hand in it.

The Reasons for Our Frustration: God is just

We struggle with the same issues Solomon did. He lists them for us in Chapter 3 and 4, and they were the source of his frustration, and the source of ours as well.

Inequity (vv 16-17)

Life isn't fair. And it isn't perfect. If it was, the driver who ran you off the road speeding by you would be pulled over at the next mile marker. The person who gossips about you would have her teeth fall out that same night. But the Christian NFL player doesn't always win the Super Bowl, and the guy living it up as a partying pagan doesn't always fumble at the goal line. Bad things happen to good people, and equally frustrating good things happen to bad people! But we really don't want to live in that kind of world either. We just want other people to be punished for evil, but we want to be allowed to get away with it.

Death

Death, we are told, is the great equalizer. One out of one people die. And one out of one animal die. While it looks like man and animal experience the same fate, that is not the case. "Who knows," Solomon asks, "if the breath of man ascends upward..." Life isn't fair. We work like a dog, and then die just like a dog, or so Solomon concluded "under the sun." But we know, as Christians, that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Oppression/When it seems the wicked are always winning

Ecc 4:1-3

In Psalm 73, the Psalmist said, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps nearly slipped...when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." But then, an important thing happens. "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me, until I went to the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their end."

A pastor had a golf buddy who was not a Christian who was always challenging him. As they put their clubs away, he said, "See pastor, in my world, the good guy always finishes last." The pastor replied, "Yeah, but the bad guy goes to hell."

Rivalry/Envy

Ecc 4:4-6

A survey on PersonnelToday.com reported that nine out of ten office workers suffer from "professional envy" of colleagues they picture to have more glamorous or higher paying

jobs...a third envy a partner or spouse's jobs, while a fifth feel jealous of a colleague further up the work "ladder." We compensate for those feelings by underperforming or over competing.

Materialism... riches over relationship...things more important than people

Ecc 4:7-8...This is directed to those who blow up their relationships and never take time for friendships to accumulate money and things. They don't have to be mutually exclusive, but often we let our ambition for things and status and money to push out the important things. You find yourself, at the end of the day, rich. But alone.

The Root of Our Isolation: God is love

Ecc 4:9-12

We were made for relationships. "It is not good for the man to be alone," God said. We need to keep reminding ourselves that God revealed Himself to us as a God in relationship with Himself. The Trinity is an eternal relationship in which God is one-yet-three. I don't have time to go into all the explanations of that, but the Bible proclaims it's true. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. And this relationship is open-ended. God invites us to join Him in this joyful dance. He didn't create us because He was lonely. He created us because He wanted us to enjoy what He had!

Earthly relationships are a reflection of that eternal and invisible reality. We are made to relate, not isolate. We are wired to know and be known, because the God Who made us is like that. He knows that the most painful reality of Hell is not the flames but the eternal aloneness. And those who are lonely can testify to how difficult it is.

2 are better than 1. For working, for walking, for warmth, and for weaving. You know, when we get married, we are to leave, cleave, and weave a life together. I will sometimes use the three-stranded cord as an illustration in a wedding ceremony.

Rope makers know that you can take two cords and wrap them together...into eternity... and they will eventually come apart. But they learned if you put a third cord in the center and wrap the other two around that cord and around each other, it will never come apart!

We have changed marriage into a relationship where it's just the two of us against the world. We wrap ourselves around each other and then we wonder why it comes apart. But the marriages that understand the need for that third strand in the middle...don't come apart easily at all.

When a marriage is done right, with Christ as the center strand, you create something that is greater than just two people clinging to each other. There's a synergy that is created...and those marriages will seldom pull apart.

Popularity (4:13-16)

This ends with a particularly telling thought. We live in a day when people long for popularity and recognition from others. People will do silly, funny, dangerous and even deadly things in an effort to get more likes on their social media accounts. It is a very enticing sin in our day, and the church is not immune. Neither is politics. Here's the story of a popular king that got old, was replaced by a popular upstart young king (who was, ironically from the same background as the old king) and we see the rise and fall and fickleness of popular applause. It's frustrating to those who hang their self-worth on this.

Solomon is no doubt reflecting back to his own father, David's, history. The popularity of a young king named Saul was replaced by the rising star of King David. David's popularity was eventually eclipsed by the new young king named Solomon. Solomon, once the rock star of Israel, is now the old king who sees his once soaring popularity poll sliding south.

If we are seeking an earthly crown of glory, it will perish quickly. But if the crown we hope to wear is an eternal reward that we can "cast down" at the feet of Jesus, we will find our star never sets as we live in the glory of making Jesus famous!

Paul said, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Galatians 6:14). May our pursuit be that kind of glory...the glory of the cross.

What's the solution to our dissatisfaction, our frustration, our isolation? Knowing the God Who invites you to come into a relationship with Him through Jesus! It brings satisfaction and fulfillment and fellowship to us. Without God, life is without meaning...without purpose. With God, you get meaning now...and heaven later! And it comes by grace, through faith in Jesus. Won't you trust Him today?

Resources and References:

Nelson, *The Problem of Life With God*

Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*

Stedman, *Is This All There is to Life?*

Jeremiah, *Heaven on Earth*

Kidner, *Ecclesiastes*