

Ecclesiastes

Avon Heights, 4th Quarter, 2009

Cycle #1: *The Agonizing Search for a Meaningful Life*

LESSON #3:

Cycle #1:
Eccl. 1:12-3:15
The Agonizing Search for a Meaningful Life

(A) Wed. Oct. 14th

Reading:

Eccl. 1:12-2:23

Trivial Pursuit:

Looking Under the Sun

(B) Sun. Oct. 18st

Reading:

Eccl. 2:24-3:15

Everything is

Beautiful: God is the

Focus of Life

Extra Reading: 10/21

- **Eternity in Our Hearts**

(A) TRIVIAL PURSUIT: Looking Under the Sun

(Eccl. 1:12-2:23)

I. The Vanity of Wisdom - 1:12-18

1. What conclusion does Solomon reach concerning his efforts to find ultimate understanding and joy by human wisdom? **1:13-14**
2. How does Solomon describe the task of searching out life's meaning? Who gives this task to all men? **1:13**
3. In spite of his great wisdom, what could Solomon NOT do? **1:15** Name some things that you see that are "crooked" and "lacking" in the world you live in.
4. What did Solomon conclude about wisdom as the answer to life's meaning? **(1:16-18)** Is he talking about the "wisdom" available to men "under the sun" or is this the wisdom that "comes down from above?" Can true wisdom be found in things under the sun? **(Prov. 9:10; 3:5-7)**
5. What role does education play in your life? How have you seen wisdom to be a "grievous," "painful" task? **1:13, 18**

II. The Futility of Pleasure, Projects & Possessions- 2:1-11

1. Can one find the meaning of life in the pursuit of pleasure that is NOT immoral or excessive?
2. Did Solomon set limits on himself in his search for life's meaning in pleasure, projects and possessions?
3. What do you think of in the midst of times of pleasure you enjoy in this life? Do they serve as reminders of the grace & love of a caring heavenly Father?

III. Purposes of Life Examined - 2:12-23

1. What does Solomon have to say about someone who would attempt the same experiment after all of his unsuccessful attempts? **2:12**
2. Is there any practical advantage to being wise rather than a fool? **Vs 14-16**
3. If Solomon found joy in the accomplishments of his great projects, why did he hate his life and the work he had done under the sun? **2:17-23; Psa. 49:10**

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Eternity in Our Hearts

by Gary Henry

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

One thing that sets human beings apart is their yearnings. We have deep desires for things that we don't have, longings for joys that we sometimes can't even identify or express. There is something about us that is infinite -- and that something finds it very frustrating to live in a world that is not only finite but broken.

In **Ecclesiastes 3:11**, we hear not only that "eternity" is in our hearts, but that God put it there. We have longings for things beyond this world because we are *made* that way. Given our created nature, we can no more not need eternity than we can not need joy or beauty or any other desire that is part of the human package. Some yearnings just won't go away no matter how hard we try to ignore them, and eternity is one of them. We can deny it, suppress it, or try to fulfill it with lesser things, but the need is still there. Plainly, we were made for a different world than the kind of world this one has become, and until our hearts find the home in which they were intended to rest, we will have an unfulfilled yearning.

It is important to face fully what it means that eternity is in our hearts. It doesn't just mean that we need something that is *hard* to find in the temporal world; it means we need something that is *impossible* to find here. When sin broke the perfection of Eden, God was forced to withdraw Himself from direct contact with the human race. But we were *made* for communion with Him, and so now, the thing we were *made* for, we can only *long* for!

We should give our yearnings for eternal life free reign. There is nothing wrong with groaning (**2 Corinthians 5:1-8**), and we should give ourselves permission to do it. Indeed, there is something seriously wrong with a person who could live in this world (ruined as it is by rebellion against what is right) and not groan. So we should *embrace* the eternity that is in our hearts, even at the price of the emptiness that it makes us feel right now. To set our hearts on eternity is not to slight our responsibilities in the here and now. It enables us to fulfill those responsibilities in *hope*.

He who has no vision of eternity
will never get a true hold of time.

Thomas Carlyle

Gary Henry REACHING FORWARD December 23

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Sunday, October 18, 2009

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(B) EVERYTHING IS BEAUTIFUL: God is the Focus of Life (Eccl. 2:24-3:15)

“President Kennedy once observed that ‘Human problems, created by men, can be solved by men.’ a popular idea, but utterly false. We have created problems in this universe which are completely beyond us. they have no answer ‘under the sun.’ The verses in this lesson will tell us that God has a purpose for men but that their efforts to determine by their own wisdom what that purpose is have been agonizingly futile. All we have found is puzzles and paradoxes which baffle us. As Solomon has already warned us, we will discover only things crooked we cannot straighten and things missing we cannot find. Furthermore, we must be warned that even when we find God and His purpose in Christ through the gospel, there will still be many things we do not understand about life here on earth. There are just too many missing pieces which God alone possesses. Like Job, we must learn beyond understanding to fear and trust Him.” (Paul Earnhart, **ECCLESIASTES: Search for the Meaning of Life**)

Outline and Questions:

I. *A Flash of Light* - 2:24-26

1. If life’s purpose and meaning are not to be found in the good found under the sun, how are we to view our labor and the fruit of labor which we do under the sun? **2:24**
2. The ability to eat and enjoy good things depends on what? **2:25**
3. What is the difference in the way the two people in **2:26** approach life? (**cf. Prov. 13:22; 28:8**)

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II. *You Will Not Have All the Answers - 3:1-15*

1. With “eternity in our hearts” what kinds of Q’s do we want answers for? **3:11**
2. What kinds of problems does God’s providence bring into every person’s life? **3:1-8**
3. What is Solomon still looking for? **3:9**
4. To what person is everything made beautiful (appropriate NAS95)? **Eccl. 3:11; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11**
5. Can man by observing the world find out God’s purpose? **3:11; I Cor. 1:20-21**
6. Can man by his wisdom change the way God rules this world the sun? **3; 14-15**
7. Why did God make the world so baffling to man? **3:14**