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Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

All has been Heard

1. All has been heard, the writer says, as we reach the end of the book. At first it may have appeared to many of us a bit impermeable or morose or morbid, but in fact it contains rich treasures of wisdom and has lifted our burden rather than added to them.
2. God's word is completely opposite escapism. It confronts us with the foundational truth about everything and underlies all wisdom and knowledge.
3. Returns to a consideration of the covenant and the shepherd of the covenant and his judgment of all people.
4. Speaking in the third person enables the Teacher to stand back a little from what he's said and to insist they are not his words but God's.
5. We saw at the beginning of the series that Solomon was the wise man *par excellence* of the old covenant. But he tells us that these words are of the one shepherd. This immediately reminds us of Christ, and also reminds us of the unity of God's Word under the spirit and the abiding relevance of it for founding our lives which is troubled by the frustration of God's judgment.
6. We are also warned to beware of that which would go beyond the word of that one shepherd (Ecc. 12:12). That reminds us in turn of Revelation 22:18. The New Testament canon closes with a reminder not to add or take away from what has been written. We need no more and no less than what God has said for the foundation of our lives. To add anything or take away anything is dangerous.
7. Man's own way is futile given the burden of God. Three things are important to note in considering the conclusion as a whole:

a) Covenantal curse

b) Covenantal wisdom

c) Covenantal work

1. The reality of God's covenant dealings lie for the teacher at the centre of life. So we are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers. We are wise or fools in relation to God. Under the curse life and its endeavours often appear in many aspects to be vain or meaningless or futile.

The fall is the only thing that makes total sense of the human condition. The teacher has been showing us that in the face of the curse, the response is to assume responsibility in life in terms of God's commandments and covenant. At the same time the teacher has been careful to show what life is reduced to if we fail to reckon life with God. It's vanity. Meaning, purpose and hope can be found in nothing if we fail to reckon with God, because of the curse.

We tend to be selective with the data on this front. In the face of the reality of the futility of man's striving, many of us would like to reduce the disquiet of reflecting on the burden of God which this book has us do. Because we want everything to be simple and happy and easy. It can make like seem uncomfortable. The world – and often Christians – don't want to face this. It's why we often miss this book’s message. Scores of people are attracted to places where they would hear a psychological gospel. They think Christianity is a way to avoid life under the sun.

We're often uncomfortable with the rejoicing and celebrating life. All the very human gifts Ecclesiastes has spoken about. We have been very affected by Greek notions that there are things more spiritual than romance and wine. That's an equally dangerous error. We must confront the whole of God's word. We cannot ignore the trauma and pretend all is well, nor can we rebel in a mystical romanticism that disconnects us from life. So we can't be stoics or epicureans. Neither is acceptable for the Christian.

Man's efforts to solve his own problems are weariness and futility if he come to grips with God's word. You cannot overcome this burden no matter how much you educate and study. The sheer quantity of these clamouring voices we hear brings people to even give up on the idea that you can ever know truth at all. Michael Kelley notes that the preacher is not anti-intellectual, seeing books and learning as a waste of time, but that man's study has nothing to gain if it is not grounded in God's word.

1. Covenant wisdom. We see throughout Ecclesiastes the radical contrast between wise and fool, covenant keeping and covenant breaking.

The wisdom the Teacher gives us is like a goad, a long stick with a spike on the end to prod cattle to keep them from wandering off (Ecc. 12:9-11).

Remember that this covenantal wisdom God gave Solomon is not narrow. The wisdom of God is not limited to some narrow sacred pious realm of life. In 1 Kings 4:29-33, we hear Solomon spoke of the natural world. Of all these different aspects of life.

Kelley states that the words of this book address men as kingdom builders, as workers on behalf of God's kingdom or man's kingdom. And each is built on a philosophy of life with a goal to be achieved. In building his own kingdom, man steadfastly denies his endeavours must be subject to God.

The age into which the preacher teaches is one in which the covenant people are being led astray by pagan thought. So he urges faithful commitment even when it means being despised. It may seem fruitless at times. It may seem like all are against us and no one sees it our way, but covenant wisdom therefore must be planted deep in our being so it becomes all pervasive.

The Word of God is not simply a collection of words to be analyzed and scrutinized. The biblical -idea of wisdom is that the truth is in us. We do need to do Bible study but these words on the page in front of a nonbeliever don't transform their inner being. The word opens our hearts to remember our creator. By the Holy Spirit the word is living and acting in us. It's not like any other book.

Ecclesiastes says that all life is religion. And all analysis of life takes place either in context of God's wisdom or in the truth of something else. Unbelief is not absence of belief, but misplaced belief. Analysis of life must take place in the context of truth and this is where God's wisdom and man's radically depart.

Happily the word of God comes to us not in a great philosophical system but by the Holy Spirit.  Ecclesiastes comes to us in parable and principle, like a summer evening conversation sitting on the porch.

1. Covenant work.

The teacher has had a surprising amount to say about work, something the Greek philosophers despised. Wisdom and work are inseparably related. If you don't do anything you don't need wisdom.

Work was affected by the curse. The whole duty of man is to fear God, remember him and keep his commands. This was the original calling of man in Eden. At the heart of God's original command was the duty of working. It wasn't burdensome at the beginning. It was about turning creation into a culture, to extend the kingdom of His majesty.

Wisdom is not just personal but civilizational. Adam worked and cultivated the garden before the Fall. Since then we all have had to work under the curse. In the new and final stage we will still serve God. Christ has worked by grace.

We can never actually separate work and the image of God. We were made in God's image. We were made to imitate God's handiwork and to develop everything in his kingdom. The goal of this duty was the kingdom of God. In our state of grace the goal of that duty is the same - the rule and reign of God.

True work is the religious energy of a society in action, remaking all things in term of God's calling. The redeemed man is a working man (Rev. 22:3). Jesus said his father is always working (Jn. 5:17).

1. In Christ’s work at the cross, sin was condemned. By this cross every work is brought into judgment and at the last, sin will be condemned. The cross for us in the state of grace is also the tree of life. By the cross we are re-established in life and blessed in our work and have access again to the throne of God. All the vanity is gone.
2. Through the cross our work is transformed. Our work won't be tainted by sorrow. We will joyfully express ourselves as God's image bearers. Our whole duty in this state of grace is to remember and reverence God. The word ‘liturgy’ means ‘public work.’ For it is here the redemption of our work and calling begins because of the work of Jesus Christ.