An Unhappy Business – Ecclesiastes 1:13

1. Introduction
   1. Ecclesiastes is a book that if you leave out the last few passages of the book, is incredibly pessimistic and dark and jaded. But, that pessimism leads to hope by the end of the book.
   2. It is a book that offers a lot sympathy to the person who says, “This is a miserable awful, good for nothing world.” Solomon says, “You’re not wrong.”
   3. He spends the majority of the book talking about the worthlessness of the world and of what it brings to the table. But, by the end of the book he offers some wisdom about what/who brings hope and meaning and purpose to life.
   4. Ecclesiastes 1:13 > “an unhappy business that God has given to man”
      1. It’s a good summation of the book. All that Solomon looks at around Him, he observes that it’s not great at all. There are so many burdens and weights.
   5. Maybe you don’t think that. This book is certainly helpful for those who are in the pit. But for those who “don’t think that way”, Solomon is going to burst a few of those colorful bubbles in your life. Solomon brings us down to earth, quite literally. Tells us what life is like for those under the sun.
2. The World Is Broken
   1. Things aren’t “getting bad.” In reality, the world has been mangled since Genesis 3.
   2. The world has always been full of miserable, mean, horrible, sadistic, wicked people. There have been wars and conflicts since nearly the beginning. Only for 2 chapters did that not exist.
      1. Eccl. 1:3 > Perhaps a hearkening back to the curse laid on man in the garden. The work that we, as mankind, do after the curse is hard labor. And we have to continually do it. There’s more frustration there and less payoff. When you plant a garden, do you plow and plant once then comes the perpetual harvest? No!!! Every year, you must upkeep it and sometimes even move the crops to new areas.
      2. Ex: Abby washing clothes
      3. In our bubble of America, it can be easy for us to not appreciate some of the hard things others have to experience. But Solomon, like so many other books, pulls back the curtain and gives us some insight into what all goes on in the world.
         1. “Life is VAIN, highness. Anyone who says otherwise is trying to sell you something.”
      4. People will try to offer encouragement like “look for the sunshine” or “find the silver-lining”. But they only offer that with earthly wisdom or really just more of “on-the-wall-wisdom”. Whether it’s a Facebook wall or wall of an office or home. It’s just some generic wisdom that doesn’t really help anyone without some reinforcement.
   3. We will become very frustrated by the thought that “it doesn’t have to be this way” (Eccl. 8:16-17)
      1. You’ll hear this thrown around in politics. “It doesn’t have to be this way.” The solution they give can often be even worse than where we’re at now. Even those in high positions of authority and power can observe that the world is a messed-up place, but even they are limited in what’s possible to change that.
      2. Eccl. 8:16-17 > “I have the answer!!! I can solve all your problems!!!” If someone starts talking like that, be real careful.
         1. Btw, none of the ones saying that are as wise as Solomon. And yet Solomon says, “I looked and you won’t find all the answers.”
         2. Ok, well what if we got all of the smartest minds together and we find a solution to stop this crisis. Solomon says, “I’ll save ya the trouble. I have all wisdom and didn’t find it. You can’t fix everything that’s crooked.”
   4. Solomon, who was more capable of making big changes than any of us ever will, felt helpless at what he saw (Eccl. 4:1)
      1. Solomon could actually do something for the oppressed and He says, “I cannot fix this!” At least not permanently. He could do some good for awhile but another foolish leader comes along and spoils all that.
         1. Eccl 2:18 > Hates all his labor for he dies and his possessions go to another. In the same vain, the hard work of trying to do good can be undone in one generation. (Divided kingdom)
   5. Solomon should crush the “vision of the anointed” (Eccl. 1:16-18)
      1. The vision of the anointed says that if we search hard and long enough, we can find the best and brightest to take care of this situation. To improve the lives of others.
         1. Eccl. 1:16-18
         2. Solomon, again, says “This is vanity.”
         3. Solomon does offer up the idea that wisdom is better than folly. Earthly wisdom will get you farther than foolishness. But its not going to create heaven on earth. Utopia does not exist. Anyone that says so is dangerous.
      2. Others can easily identify problems of the world but Solomon, to use the words of Queen Sheba who came to visit him, “You don’t know the half of it.” And I’m sure God would say, “You don’t know it at all.”
   6. Don’t be shocked in finding that this world is a mess (Eccl. 5:8)
      1. Again, it’s nearly always been this way.
      2. People will say, “We live in an age of injustice!” You think the Christians living during the time of Nero and Domitian thought as much? You think justice reigned in the time of Jeremiah as it pertained to earthly kings?
         1. Oppression and injustice have always persisted. Sometimes better and sometimes worse. But always there.
      3. In this country, we have freedom. Some would yell, “No! We live in a country of tyrants!” > Go outside these borders and experience what a majority of the population has every day of their life.
         1. We don’t have to worry about waking up and wondering whether or not our home is going to be shelled. We don’t have to worry about so many simple things such as food and shelter as others do.
      4. And yet, for all that, how long does it take us to find injustice and inconsistencies in our leadership? We don’t have to look far even in spite of the prosperity and peace we have in this country (compared to other times in our country’s history).
         1. Look no further for a time of peace and prosperity than Solomon. Yet what does he observe? Injustice and oppression and prevail because this world of full of sin and wickedness. Even he couldn’t get rid of it, no matter how much he tried.
      5. People today (and they have always said) “You can change the world!!!” Solomon says, “No you can’t.”
         1. That doesn’t mean we can’t make any difference. But there are only so many levels you can go. “If only people did this!” Well they’re not! Certainly not the whole world is going to!
            1. “That’s a grim way to look at life! That’s pretty pessimistic!” It is and Solomon wants us to feel that. The world is a broken, messed up place.
         2. You know these ideas about “paying it forward” in a drive-thru… Solomon would say, “That’s great. What about the next person? Did their meal get paid for? And on and on.”
         3. I was able to help out someone financially because of their medical bills. Solomon says, “What about the next day?” Well not the next day. I’m limited!
            1. Exactly! There is a finite amount of good we can do.
      6. Does that mean we do no good? No we’ll get to that. That’s not it. But part of it is if all we look for in a day is the small rays of sunshine that give us little pick me ups and faith in humanity, Solomon says, “That sun will set.” That way of thinking is not sustainable to this life. There’s not enough positivity in the world that can keep us above water long enough.
      7. Our own life is broken (Eccl. 2:4-11)
         1. “I am a failure”. That’s true! We all are.
         2. What’s more dangerous is someone reaching the end of their life without God and they say, “I am not a failure!” (The rich man in Luke 12:19 > Self, you have many good things stored up. Rest, eat, drink and be merry.” > That person is truly a failure.
         3. Solomon accomplished more than anyone ever will. He accomplished more than anyone every will. And what is his evaluation of his accomplishments? The Queen of Sheba’s jaw drops at what she sees in Solomon’s palace… Yet, **I am a failure.** 
            1. You can point to all of the stuff you’ve acquired and accomplished, but one day you die and your stuff goes to someone else. Your accomplishments are eventually forgotten.
      8. It would be incredibly depressing if that was all life has to offer. But what Solomon has so expertly and wisely done in this book is burst every bubble. Take away every ray of sunshine or silver lining someone might offer up and what are you left with? Well there is but one remedy.
3. God Is Our Only Hope
   1. He is the answer to the question that Solomon is asking throughout this book (Eccl. 1:15)
      1. Some translations offer this verse up as a question. Who can do this but God Himself? Only God can permanently make what was broken whole again. Only God can bend what was crooked and make it straight.
   2. Again, going to what Solomon is illustrating… The world offers up good things and Solomon says, “Take that away and what do you have?” You have hopelessness. You have nothing.
      1. But with God, the smallest of things become hopeful.
   3. When we see this world as broken, then every gift is savored with more gratitude (Eccl. 2:24)
      1. Now that God is in the picture, I can enjoy some of the small blessings life has.
         1. Otherwise, those small things in life are like the only thing we’re holding onto. That’s the only thing we care about.
            1. Another way to frame it up… I don’t deserve the simple pleasures of life. Food could taste horrible. I deserve for that to be the case. But God has chosen to make those things good… Now I have somewhere to direct that gratitude. “Thank you, God.”

Now, that makes the simple pleasures in life surrounded with the aura of God’s goodness. “God is the giver of every good and perfect.” When I see something good, I can say, “God is there.” It’s not just this miserable broken world.

And even the blessing adds a blessing. Any time I have opportunity to think on God’s goodness is a pleasure. And to observe that God is there. So, you enjoy how that feels… One day we will always say, “God is there.” God is right there in front of me in the fullest and most perfect way.

* 1. We are freed from burdens that we are not capable of carrying (Eccl. 3:12-13; 12:13)
     1. Chapter 3:12-13 > Comes on the heels of “time for this and time for that”. The idea is that this is how life is. You can’t have the good without the bad. You can’t take away the mourning or wars or destruction just because its bad.
        1. But, what we can do is verse 12… live righteously and you be the good that you yourself would like to see. You enjoy the gifts that God has given you and acknowledge it is a gift from Him.
     2. Instead of trying to stick it to the man. Trying to fight the corruption organizations and leaders… Be kind. Be grateful to God. Help out your fellow man.
     3. **12:13 > Fear God and keep His commandments… This sums it all up.**
        1. What are we here for?! “THIS!!!”
        2. “It’s gotta be more!” No this is enough. In fact, it is more than enough.
           1. Eph.3:19 > Be filled with all the fullness of God (when we fear God and keep His commandments, we find that His goodness is overflowing.)
  2. It frees us from worrying about every little thing people say (Eccl. 7:21-22)
     1. One of my favorite historical authors is David McCullough. John Adams show… The mudslinging that took place between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson when they were campaigning was brutal… “a blind, bald, crippled, toothless man who is a hideous hermaphroditic character with neither the force and fitness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.” Meanwhile, Abigail is there telling John him to put down the paper. Stop reading that nonsense.
        1. I am so glad we don’t stoop so low to such insults today… We now get to hear what everyone thinks at a moments notice. We can rattle off a thought in a few seconds. And those few seconds can cause a forest fire online. Feelings hurt and names run through the dirt. We get sick of it.
        2. Solomon says, “Leave it be.” Maybe you even have similar thoughts to what someone is throwing on the fire. But Solomon says, “Don’t do it. Don’t put that out there.”
     2. As much as depends on me, be at peace with all men. That goes back to my last lesson… We are going to be in the world and hear those things, but don’t be of the world and throw it right back at em.
        1. We are pressing on toward a world beyond this one. Don’t waste your time in worthless and frivolous debates.
  3. He is even capable of bringing beauty out of the mess that we see all around us (Eccl. 3:1-11; Rom. 8:28)
     1. Verse 9-11 > Beautiful in its time > Same word for “God saw and it was good”. Same word for Moses’ parents seeing him after birth “and that he was beautiful”.
        1. God can take what is so messed up and ugly and turn it into something good. Something beautiful. That’s how we can frame it up as well.
     2. Rom. 8:28 > And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, those who are the called according to His purpose
        1. If you love the Lord, then the tragedy that you witness around you can be seen with light. Even in the extreme…
           1. Job experienced tragedy after tragedy. But by the end, Job sees goodness. He sees the goodness of God even in that.
           2. Paul, because He comes to truly know God and see Him for who He is, finds a silver lining in his sin.

Paul can look at his own life and the filth that he was and observe God’s grace being worked out through him. “Even I can be forgiven.”

* + - 1. Because we see God, we can take on any of the dark things of the world and still see the light because God is the light and provides that light.
         1. So, we count it all joy when trials come. When a thorn in the flesh comes, we try to learn from that and work with it. Grow with it.
      2. With God out of the picture in the midst of tragedy, how can you carry on? How do you have hope? It’s a fool’s hope if you do!
         1. The whole book, Solomon is telling us the world is a rotten place. There is no hope. Unless we see God. God is the only reason its not more rotten. We messed it up. And He wants us to see what sin has done and what its still doing. “Come to me.”
      3. The Holocaust Museum – If you haven’t been, everyone should go at least once. That museum so expertly demonstrates the horrors of what the Nazis did upon Jews, gypsies, blacks, and the many other targeted groups.
         1. “That will never happen again!!! We will never forget!” Many do and many did. Just go look at world history. It hasn’t even been 100 years since the end of WWII… yet look at all of the atrocities done.

We can’t put our faith in humanity. We must put our faith and trust in God. Humanity only breaks and makes it worse. God is the only one who can make us whole.

* 1. We want to run from grief, death, failure. Instead, Solomon invites us to look those things in the eye and be motivated to long for the hope that God provides.
     1. Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.
        1. If you thirst, if you long for something better… The Lord says, “Come.”