

# Making Life Profitable

Some people think the book of Ecclesiastes is very 'negative'. Discussions about the book may start with comments such as "It's very depressing isn't it?"

Ecclesiastes does certainly have some serious truths for us to hear, but we should not let a preference for more obviously 'upbeat' Bible passages prevent us from benefiting from the deep spiritual lessons contained within this wonderful book. To help our appreciation, we will consider just two questions:

- ❖ Who was the Preacher?
- ❖ Are our lives 'vanity'?

## Who was the Preacher?

Ecclesiastes starts with, *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:1)*. This Preacher is not given a name; the main point is his role rather than his identity. Although we do not have the name of the Preacher, lots of information is given about him which seems to point to one conclusion – Solomon was the Preacher.

- ❖ The Preacher was the son of David (1:1)
- ❖ he was king over Israel in Jerusalem (1:12)
- ❖ he was associated with wisdom (1:16, 2:9, 12:9)
- ❖ he built houses (2:4)
- ❖ he collected silver and gold (2:8)



- ❖ he had many concubines (2:8)
- ❖ he arranged many proverbs (12:9)

These are all characteristics of Solomon, which we can look out for when we read the records of his life in 1 Kings chapters 1 to 11 and 1 Chronicles chapters 1 to 9. One especially convincing phrase is that the Preacher speaks of God giving someone riches and wealth and honour (Ecclesiastes 6:2) – the exact triplet of words which God used when He gave Solomon these blessings in 2 Chronicles 1:11–12. However, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the writer is presented not as Solomon, but as 'The Preacher'; the focus is on the message, not on the man.

## Are Our Lives 'Vanity'?

The overriding theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is that life without God is meaningless, or 'vanity' (literally, 'grasping after wind').

The work which man does is said to have 'no profit' (1:3); there seems to be no end result to the endless cycles of nature (1:4–7); the lives and achievements of men seem to be so similar that 'there is nothing new under the sun' (1:9); people don't remember the past and they won't

remember what is to come in the future either (1:11). So human existence on planet Earth is said to be without meaning.

The Preacher says that he tested the different options there are for people in this life. He writes:

*I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:17).*

He then describes how he indulged in all the pleasures there are, to experience life to the full, but found there was no profit under the sun (2:11).

His experiences are very true to life and particularly applicable to lifestyles today. Some people devote their entire lives to acquiring wisdom, reading as many books as they can and acquiring as many life experiences as possible. Many more devote their lives to a time-consuming career which in turn allows them to spend money on various pleasures.

If only they would acknowledge the sober lesson of the Preacher, that this way of life is vanity and has no lasting profit, they might eventually reach the same overwhelmingly positive conclusion as the Preacher:

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*

## **Life with Meaning**

Once we bring God into our lives, we find the true meaning of life. We may have career ambitions, we may like to build and have projects, we may spend money on things which we find enjoyable. If this was all we desired in life,

then our lives would indeed be vanity. However, when we find out about the gospel message of salvation we discover that God wants us to become members of His family. He wants us to be part of His plan and glorify Him. Let's remember this when we read Ecclesiastes; contrast the emptiness of life without God with how our lives can be – full of purpose and hope.

Let's avoid the trap into which God's people fell when they spoke against the Lord saying *"It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" (Malachi 3:14).*

Rather, we can rejoice that God has called us from a life which could be meaningless to one full of purpose now and hope for the future.



The apostle Paul wrote to believers in Corinth about the wonder of the coming resurrection from the dead when Jesus returns. He gave them this encouragement, which is now passed on to us:

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

**Stephen Blake**