

Ecclesiastes, II

Brevard Child's position, which we talked about last time, is sort of a mediating position in that it does not develop a very intricate structure, but it does recognize that there is some apparent thematic progression and movement in the book. I do think the first half of the book is talking about the vanity of what we try to accomplish in our work, and then the second half deals with the vanity of what we can know, what we can understand, and how limited our understanding is. That is not to say that the themes are not found in both parts, but it is a matter of emphasis.

In this session we will return to the thematic overview of the book of Ecclesiastes that we looked at last time. First we will work through the content with our Bibles open, highlighting and reflecting on certain verses and themes and asking questions that are of practical concern. This is an inductive, thematic overview that I put together as I was reading through the book. It does seem to me that there is some kind of progression and that it is possible to outline the author's areas of investigation of life under the sun. The book begins with the superscription, which is the motto of the book: "Meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless," says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless." The word, "meaningless," is sometimes translated as "vanity," "empty," "futile," "useless," or "absurd." The original word actually means "breath-like," "vapor-like," or "ephemeral." Is a breath meaningless? No, it is very meaningful, but the breath you just took is not of ultimate value—you could have skipped it and done without it. If you do not have another breath coming, that last one is not going to do you a great deal of good. In that sense it was so temporary and so ephemeral that it is ultimately meaningless.

Next we get into the "endless round" beginning in verse 3, the poem that opens the book:

What does man gain from all his labor,
at which he toils under the sun?
Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north,
round and round it goes,
ever returning to its course.
All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.
All things are wearisome,
more than anyone can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.
What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there anything of which one can say,
"Look, this is something new"?
It was here already, long ago;
it was here before our time.

There is no remembrance of men of old,
 and even those who are yet to come
 will not be remembered
 by those who follow.

This poem focuses on the endless round; there seems to be no real progress. The rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. The water returns from whence it came and flows down again. The wind blows from the south and then from the north, then it turns around and blows from the south again. There is no real progress. Verse 4, which says, “Generations come and generations go but the earth remains forever,” means that nothing changes. It is not talking about the permanence or eternity of the material world. Literally it says, “The earth stands.” It does not really change.

Then the teacher begins to pursue wisdom. His early conclusion in 1:18 is that, “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; / the more knowledge, the more grief.” Have you ever experienced that? There is a sense in which ignorance is bliss, but it is also very dangerous. The penalty can be even greater than wisdom. But there is truth in the statement that “with much wisdom comes much sorrow.”

The opening poem has a sense of monotony and a sense of the feelings that accompany depression and mid-life crisis: “Why do I get up on Monday morning? Nothing is being accomplished; it all seems so meaningless, in an ultimate sense.” In chapter 2, the writer begins to explore life’s activities, the things that could be done in life. He first explores pleasure: “I thought in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’ But that also proved meaningless.” Pleasure was breath-like, very temporary; I thought it was fun for a while, but then it was meaningless in no time. “‘Laughter,’ I said, ‘is foolish and what does pleasure accomplish?’ I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom.”—He was experimenting.—“I wanted to see what was worthwhile for man to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.”—He tested pleasure, but that did not work; he moved to building projects, but that did not work; he began to amass property, but that did not help him discover the key to meaningful life. In verse 9 he says, “I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.” He also amassed power, or, you could say, prestige. He has tried pleasure, projects, property, and power. Does that sound at all contemporary to you? That is where human beings seek meaning and significance in life under the sun. Different people approach it in different ways. Some are very industrious and they take on the projects. Others like the finer things of life; they go for the property. Some are just above that and they say, “Forget that; slow down a little bit and enjoy yourself,” and they go for pleasure. Then, probably the ultimate temptation for those who can gain it is power. If you cannot have power in a political sense, at least you try to gain power over some other individual. These are real temptations. This is supposedly in pursuit of the good life, but the writer found it ultimately disappointing. Notice verses 10 and 11: “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; / I refused my heart no pleasure. / My heart took delight in all my work, / and this was the reward for all my labor. / Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done / and what I had toiled to achieve, / everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; / nothing was gained under the sun.” Is there a message here for us and for our acquaintances and friends? Of course there is. This writer has already “been there and done that,” so if we detect in ourselves this idea that “if I could only build that dream house or if I could only get that degree or finish that project, or if I could only gain some power in that corporate structure in which I am working, then I would be happy, then I would be fulfilled”—when we find ourselves thinking thoughts like that, we should remember that Solomon was there first and he did more and better things than you or I will ever dream of accomplishing, and he tells us frankly: “When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, temporary, and vain—a chasing after the wind. Do not even try that route; why waste your time?” A part of the function of this book is to stop us from pursuing that which does not fulfill. Georges

Bernanos says, “In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that deceives.” Part of the purpose of this book is to deconstruct, or destroy, our hope in that which ultimately will disappoint us to prevent us from chasing down the wrong trail.

The Teacher turned, then, from the supposed good life made up of pleasure, property, projects, or power, to the life of the mind, the wise life, or at least it seemed so:

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,
and also madness and folly.
What more can the king’s successor do
than what has already been done?
I saw that wisdom is better than folly,
just as light is better than darkness.
The wise man has eyes in his head,
while the fool walks in darkness
But I came to realize
that the same fate overtakes them both.
Then I thought in my heart,
“The fate of the fool will overtake me also.
What then do I gain by being wise?
I said in my heart,
“This too is meaningless.”
For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered;
in days to come both will be forgotten.
Like the fool the wise man too must die! (2:12-16)

All that education, all that intellectual development, all that thinking that he did. He says, yes, it is better to think than not to think; at least if you are thinking you have eyes in your head and you do not stumble foolishly over things. But whether you are wise or foolish, you are going to die. Even that—the development of the mind which seems a little more virtuous than the amassing of property—even that, he says, is ultimately meaningless.

Then he turned to the work life, beginning in verse 17. Verses 17 and 18 say, “You cannot take it with you,” while verses 18-21 point out that the one to whom you pass on your possessions, your heir, may be a fool. You may be wise and you may work hard and you may amass quite a fortune, and so at the end, in verses 22 and 23, he says, “The pain, grief and restlessness of it all are meaningless. What does a man get for the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief, even at night his mind is not at rest; this too is meaningless.” Have you ever laid awake at night unable to get your mind to go to sleep? That is human nature. God understands. Maybe our minds are sometimes gravitating toward the wrong thing. Maybe our minds sometimes are not adequately trusting the sovereignty of God to take care of us. I do not lose a lot of sleep; I do not lie awake unable to sleep very often. But when I was trying to finish my dissertation, I did a few times because I thought, “This will never be done.” My wife was wondering, “Will this ever be done?” I thought, “That is a very good question.” I was caught up with anxiety about the completion of something that I did not feel that I had the fortitude and the stamina to complete. The only thing that could get me to sleep was to turn my mind to God. Someone once told me to start quoting Scripture and Satan will put you to sleep. Start doing something like that and it does have a calming effect. The other thing I could do to put myself to sleep was pick up the part of the dissertation that I had written and start reading that and I would go right to sleep!

At the end of chapter 2 we have the first of those shafts of light, where the clouds part momentarily and some light streams down from heaven. To put it another way, the writer looks toward God and says, "Here, at least, is something hopeful." If you read these carefully, sometimes there is a good bit of irony, even into the hopeful glances heavenward. But he says this in verse 24-26: "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." What is he talking about? Possibly he is referring to that which immediately precedes and that only: "gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to one who pleases God." Working for that which you cannot keep is meaningless—a futile effort. Another possibility is that he could be using that word translated "meaningless" in the sense of "breath-like," ever so temporary, ephemeral, not permanent, and not ultimately meaningful. Thus even when he says, "Eat and drink and find satisfaction in your work," he may be saying that is very temporary. It could be that he is saying that even about that positive glance heavenward. It is only temporary, this eating and drinking and finding satisfaction in one's work, because that is not the ultimate answer to life.

Moving on to chapter 3, let me just say that it seems to me that one way to analyze the book is that he first looks at the activities of life. He then moves to the seasons of life, or the passages of life. Again, this is stretching a little bit to put an outline onto this book. In chapter 3 he says, "There is a time for everything under heaven; a time for this, and a time for that." These are all of life's stages. There is a time to be born, the first stage, and a time to die, the final stage. There is another glance heavenward in verse 9, which basically says, "Enjoy life and work, and remember God's deeds endure." In this world of impermanence, it is interesting that even the writer here knows that there is some permanence somewhere. God's work endures even though the work of human beings does not, as far as he can tell, looking for it under the sun.

Then 3:15 and following talks about life's inequities in the place of judgment. Then finally verses 18-22 deal with life's end, that greatest challenge. He says,

As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?

It is not very surprising that some people regard this book as the "resident alien" in the Bible. How would you explain that to someone if they came to you and said, 'I found a biblical book that denies the afterlife.'?

It is a view that is purely from the flesh. What is the metaphor that the writer uses? "Under the sun." This is the terrestrial view; this is the earthly view; this is the earthbound view. Yes, as the animals die so do we, under the sun, keeping our vision trained there. Again, that is something that we need to press on people who think that their strivings in this life and what they hope to accomplish, become, and achieve is going to bring them meaning in life. We could even talk to people and say, "Where do you hope to be in the next 10 years?" and hear what they say. Then we could say, "Okay, and then what? What about 10 years down the road from that?" And we could keep pushing them until they are old and infirm and on the brink of death, and then say, "Now look back over your life. What has that all

brought? Was that satisfying?" It is better to think about that now, while you can still do something about it, than to get there and look back. I am sure you have all heard people say that they have never encountered someone on the brink of death who looks back over his or her life and says, "I wish I had spent more time at the office." There may be some people who should have spent more time at the office, but at that point in their life, very few look back wishing that they had. Rather, they look back and regret what they did not do: the time they did not spend developing relationships within their family, the time they did not spend really seeking to serve God and seeking to lay up treasures for themselves in heaven rather than on earth. All of life is heading toward death, and we do people no favor to obscure that.

One might ask how clear an understanding the Israelites, the people of God in the Old Testament, would have had about the afterlife, eternal punishment, and heaven. The answer is that it was not very clear at all. They did seem to have some sense that there was more than just this life on this earth. They talked about Sheol, so they did understand that there was a continuation of some kind of afterlife, and that would have made sense even in the broader culture. It would have been odd if they had no notion of an afterlife. However, in the progress of God's revelation He had not disclosed very fully to them the nature of what awaited them. They knew that the fate of the righteous was better than the fate of the wicked. Perhaps this person does not have that sense at this particular time, but in terms of the overall teaching of Scripture, there was a sense that the fate of the righteous would be better. But how it was better and in what sense it was better was not always very clear, although we see it becoming increasingly clear as we get into Daniel and into the later time periods.

Let us move on to life's vexations. We have seen life's activities, then life's seasons, and now life's vexations. The powerlessness of the oppressed is something that is obvious to all of us. As we watch the news we are aware of those who are oppressed around the world and how they are powerless, and we feel for them. Maybe we are not as cognizant of what we read in verse 4. Remember this is the experience of Qoheleth, the Teacher here, so we do not want to make it absolute, but in his experience he says, "And I saw that all labor and all achievements spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." This is sort of an important self-check: why do we seek to achieve? I have learned recently that males are very bent on proving their adequacy. While women are more concerned with developing strong relationships, men are concerned to develop their adequacy. Are we seeking to prove ourselves and to achieve out of envy for our neighbors? I do not think we would want to make this statement of the Teacher's absolute because I do think that in this day, as Christians, there is a higher calling than that. However, we do need to ask ourselves that question. Is that what motivates us? That was his experience as he looked around him and he said that it is meaningless—it is a chasing after the wind. Are you trying to achieve more than so-and-so? So what? What did that really accomplish?

We read about the loneliness of the driven in chapter 4, beginning in verse 8: "There was a man all alone; / he had neither son nor brother. / There was no end to his toil, / yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. 'For whom am I toiling,' he asked, / 'and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?' This too is meaningless—a miserable business!" Indeed it is. And then it gets to that very famous verse, "Two are better than one, / because they have a good return for their work." Maybe this is a message to men who are tempted to be driven and sacrifice relationships. I have a very sad situation in my extended family where one of my brothers-in-law has so devoted himself to his work that he has left his family. He says. "I am not happy, but that is what I do. I work. I am a good worker and I am going to do it 24 hours a day if I can." Sometimes he does put in about 18 hours in the office. He sacrificed all his relationships, including his relationships with his two children and with his wife, and where is that going to take him? Where do you want to be in 10 years; where do you want to be in 20 years? When you can

no longer work, what then? People feel driven and we need to say, “God understands what you are feeling, but where is that going to take you? What will that accomplish?” We need to challenge people with that.

Then the chapter ends with the faithlessness of followers. It is talking about the poor but wise youth who is to be preferred over the old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. What is that talking about? Someone who has grown so big that he cannot learn anything from anyone else. Again, that is a temptation that we all face in some context. Remember when we were looking at the book of Proverbs and we talked about the importance of being teachable—that it is the person of wisdom who learns even from a word of rebuke more than a fool learns from 100 blows on his back. “The wise youth is to be preferred to the foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning.” That is a traditional saying, but then Qoheleth goes on to say, “The youth may come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw all who lived and walked under the sun follow the youth, the king’s successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor.” Do you see how that kind of reminds us of the endless cycle that we read in chapter 1? The old man grows old and un-teachable and obstinate, and the young man comes along and everyone rallies around the young guy. Soon, however, the young man grows old, and before you know it he has simply become that which he earlier replaced, and there needs to be another young person to come and replace him because he is no longer teachable. That is meaningless; that is the endless round.

Moving on to chapter 5, we read about the oppression of the poor. It is obvious to us that the poor are in positions of oppression. But did you know that the rich are also oppressed? That is what caught my attention in this chapter. Beginning in verse 10 we see that they are oppressed, in a sense, by their own desires. “Whoever loves money never has money enough; / whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. / This too is meaningless.”—We know that is true. Is there anything wrong with having money? No. Is the love of money wrong? Yes, because you will never have enough. The best way to have enough is to not care too much about it, and then you have enough.—“As goods increase, / so do those who consume them. / And what benefit are they to the owner / except to feast his eyes on them? / The sleep of the laborer is sweet, / whether he eats little or much, / but the abundance of the rich man / permits him no sleep.”

This same brother-in-law whom I just mentioned, when the U. S. economy was in a bit of a recession, I, who had very little, was sleeping very peacefully because I did not have a great deal of wealth to safeguard. My brother-in-law was not sleeping very well at all; he was quite concerned, in fact, about how to hold onto that which he had worked so hard to gain because he had a lot to lose in a time of recession. The laborer’s sleep is sweet. Perhaps that should be a lesson to us in terms of setting the objectives that we have in life. Where do we want to be in 10 years? Do we want to be financially far better off? At what cost? It may not be all that good for us. So the rich themselves are oppressed by their own desires for more. They are oppressed by misfortune, which they cannot prevent. They cannot guarantee that misfortune will not strike them.

This same brother-in-law made what should have been a very sound investment. It was a wise and safe investment, but some things happened with the economy that caused him to lose a great deal of money. Misfortune struck. He could not have known that; he could not have guarded against it. That was oppressive. Then, of course, finally, the rich, no matter how much they amass, are oppressed by life and death, as we read in chapter 5:16 and 17: “This too is a grievous evil: / As a man comes so, he departs, / and what does he gain, / since he toils for the wind? / All his days he eats in darkness, / with great frustration, affliction, and anger.”

Now again, as so often is the case, he turns from this reflection on the desperation of life under the sun and he says, “Then I realized it was good and proper for a man to eat and drink.” You see that he is torn by this tension of the meaninglessness he feels and a sense that there is something more and somehow it is found with God. But he cannot really describe it. He says,

I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun, during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. (5:18-20)

Now even in this positive section, how positive is it, really? Did you catch the irony there toward the end? It is a gift if he seldom reflects on his life. He has referred to his few days of life God has given him. “He seldom reflects on the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.” Even in this positive statement there is some pleasure, there is some joy to be found there, but he turns and says, “But really if you sat back and thought about it and reflected on it and realized where it was all going, even that would become unpleasant.”

Then we come to chapter 6 and it seems to me that we are coming to the end of this section here. As we come to this section, it seems that he is sort of drawing the different themes together and talking about the meaningless of life in total. He has been talking about life’s activities, seasons, vexations, and oppressions (poverty or wealth, and both are oppressive). Then he begins to draw that together in chapter 6. Wealth, possessions, and honor without enjoyment—that is meaningless. Long and prosperous life without enjoyment is meaningless. Labor and wisdom without advantage is meaningless. Then in 6:10, which is transitional to the second half, he says, “Whatever exists has already been named, / and what man is has been known; / no man can contend / with one who is stronger than he. / The more the words, / the less the meaning, / and how does that profit anyone? / For who knows what is good for a man in life during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?” I think that is the transition, then, to the next stage. He has explored all of life as best he can, trying to find something to hold on to that is meaningful under the sun, and then he comes to the point of saying, “Who knows?” That will become, then, the theme as he goes on into the second half of the book and begins to talk about life’s inscrutabilities, life’s inequities, and life’s inevitabilities.

The second half begins in chapter 7, talking about life’s inscrutabilities. They are the kinds of things that we would expect. He looks to the future and says, “Who knows the future; who can understand that?” Of course the future is inscrutable. But notice that he does begin to say, “So trust God, trust God’s sovereignty, and be patient.” Verse 13 says, “Consider what God has done: / Who can straighten / what he has made crooked? / When times are good, be happy; / but when times are bad, consider: / God has made the one / as well as the other. / Therefore, a man cannot discover / anything about his future.” However, there is the implication that God knows what God has done; what God has made crooked no one can straighten. There is this notion that God is sovereign, and so implicitly we are called upon in our lack of understanding to trust Him nevertheless. Not only can the writer not understand the future, but also he cannot even understand the present, as he says in verse 15 and following: “In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, / and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.” He says that as he looks around himself there is just too much that he does not understand. So what does he commend to the reader then? In verses 16 and 17 he says, “Do not be over-righteous, / neither be over-wise— / why destroy yourself? / Do not be over-wicked, / and

do not be a fool— / why die before your time? / It is good to grasp the one / and not let go of the other. / The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.” Notice that the word “extreme” is supplied there by our English translation. What is being said here? Can you imagine your teenager or someone saying, “I want to quote a Bible verse to you: ‘Do not be over-righteous.’” What does that mean? What did you take that to mean as you were reading it? Can a person be over-righteous? In what way can a person be over-righteous?

I think in this context it is probably saying, “Do not be self-righteous; do not be over-righteous in the sense of thinking, ‘I can establish my standing through my righteousness.’” Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise. It is astonishing to hear that, if it is really saying, “Do not be wise,” because this is a wisdom book. Again, the question of whether he has become cynical about that wisdom is a very real question, but he says, “Do not go to extremes in these directions, particularly not in a self-righteous or a self-wise way—but neither be over-wicked.” In other words, avoid both extremes; find the middle ground. I do not think that means we should be half wicked and half wise, necessarily. It is just saying that you should not think that you are going to find the meaning you are looking for by moving into an extreme form of outward piety or an extreme form of libertinism. “Hold on to the one, but do not let go of the other.” Experience your freedom, but do not let your freedom become a license to sin.

We turn then to life’s inscrutabilities. He goes through the future, the present, and then at the heart of this, chapter 7:23-29 (that is what we looked at last time), if you will remember, there was this concentration of this word, “to find, to discover, to find out,” as he kind of comes and sums things up. He says in verse 27, “Look, says the teacher, this is what I have found, this is what I have discovered.” Well what was it he found? What was his one certainty?

He found one single certainty, a theological certainty: God did it right and we failed completely. That is all he has learned so far. He has learned where the path of meaning does not lie and he is very uncertain about most things, but he is certain about this one thing. He does not understand much; he does not even understand his fellow human being—maybe one man in a thousand. Women continue to baffle him. But he does know one thing: God got it right and we failed completely. Everything else is quite inscrutable to this wise man.

Then in 8:9 and following he begins to talk about life’s inequities, but he continues to contrast this with God’s justice. On each of these points, the preceding one and this one as well, even when he looks at how frustrating and confusing life is, he does glance up and say, “But God is in control, God is just; there is an equitable power, there is an equitable punishment, and there is an equitable reward. Life does not seem fair, but do not forget that God is in control. The wicked will be buried and God’s judgment will come, so we can enjoy life and the work that is given by God.” Then in chapter 8 he comes to one of life’s inevitabilities, which is death—that which he had anticipated much earlier. Enjoy life, work, family, and so forth because life will soon be over. Notice the irony of that: “Enjoy it! It is going to be gone soon!” He talks about others of life’s inevitabilities, like time and chance and people who disappoint. That is a modern message, is it not? Have you ever heard anyone say, “Do not put your trust in people”? People will disappoint us. That is not where real life is to be found. It does not mean we are not to develop relationships, but we must not invest in them our ultimate quest for meaning.

Then in chapter 10 it seems that there is a transition. Again, there is debate about this, but it seems that there is a transition to saying that wisdom is better than folly. Whatever else the writer has been saying he now turns and says there is still a relative value to wisdom over folly. So in chapter 11 it may be—and this is hard to say for sure, but it may be—that he begins to turn in a more positive direction and says, “All right, so live courageously.” I am referring to that very enigmatic verse, “Cast your bread

upon the waters, / for after many days you will find it again.” Most people think that this involves investment in shipping. That is what most people think this means. “For in many days you will find it again.” In other words, even though life is inscrutable, even though there is no ultimate meaning that you can discover under the sun, that does not mean that you should become reclusive and depressed and not do anything. Rather, live courageously: go ahead and live and invest. Who knows? In many days you may find it again. That which you invested will come back and you will reap a reward.

Chapter 11, verse 2, says, “Give portions to seven, yes to eight, / for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.” Live courageously, and beginning in verse 7 there is a section instructing us to live joyfully. Then in chapter 12 we have a very famous passage: “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them.’” The writer, from his vantage point of great old age, turns to those much younger and says, “Do not wait until you get where I am to understand what I am saying. I have taken you on this little journey. Save yourself the trouble; remember your Creator in the days of your youth.”

How does a book like this apply in our day and age, in our situation? There was a student in my class several years ago who said that he was first drawn to the Bible and drawn into the faith through this book. One of our professors here, Jerram Barrs, has said that he was first attracted to Scripture by this book. Why is that?

The man who wrote this book is at the end of himself. He is ripe for the Gospel. He is at a turning point. He talks about not having wisdom, and yet to be able to see life this realistically is really to have a great deal of wisdom. He may not have found the key to life; he may not have the meaning that he is searching for, but he is indeed wise. He may not know where the answer is to be found, but he knows where it is not to be found. Again, I think that it is extremely useful in our own lives if we need to hear it, but in the lives of other people who are climbing that ladder, whatever that ladder may be, to say, “You ought to read this book.” Another use for this is for people who are already depressed, for people who are in mid-life crisis who have already thought all these thoughts: “What is the point of it all? I built up my savings and misfortune swept it all away.” God knows that that happens. People can find a point of contact here that can then bring them to a turning point. We will talk about that next time.