

Introduction: Pg. ___ Opening thoughts . . . Chevalier - Amazed by what God has done in four short years. Amazed that he has placed us here in our new home. Really, I am amazed by God. I am grateful for who he is, what he does, and I am grateful he has brought each of you here today. If I have not had the opportunity to meet you, I would love to on your way out today.

Not only is today the first in our new Sunday home, it is also the first in our new series: Big City. Big Questions. Our goal over the next five weeks is to ask some of life's most important questions.

- **"Why is Life riddled with so much suffering & brokenness?" (9/13)**
- **"What would Jesus say about social justice issues of our day?" (9/20)**
- **"Is Jesus a Generous Liberator or Restrictive Oppressor?" (10/4)**
- **"Is the Bible *really* the Word of God and why should I care?" (10/11)**

Today we are going small, you know, the shadow end of the pool. . .

**"What is the Point of Life? Why are we Here? Will my Life Count?"
Ecclesiastes 1:1-3; 12:13-14**

We are all breathing here this morning. Our heart is thumping with a beautiful cadence. Trillions of synapses are firing in our brain. But WHY? Why do we exist? What is our reason for being, our *raison d'être*? What are we living for? If we are not asking these questions, we should be.

I don't think many people wake up and think: "I hope my life is meaningless today." I don't think that is the case. I hope that is not the case. At the same time, how many can clearly articulate what they are living for?

FCF: The point of life can seem so elusive. The endless cycle of eating and drinking, striving and sleeping, checking our social media notifications (scroll down, scroll down, scroll down - ooh up click, like, share, heart, star, RT. . . Scroll down, scroll down); it often feels so hallow. Relationships don't go as planned. Work feels unfulfilling, and many days there seems to be very little for us to live for (if we are being honest) beyond a few points of self-interest. Is this it?

What we need is a grand view of life that will motivate us not only to get out of bed, but to punch the time clock, celebrate joys, face difficulties, and relate to people in profound ways.

To gain this kind of perspective, we are going to turn to what has been called "the most philosophical book of the OT," the book of Ecclesiastes.

- I believe Ecclesiastes speaks to 21st century America as well as any book in the Bible. It tells the story of a wise King who set out on a colossal experiment to find meaning and purpose and satisfaction in a world that seemed so unreasonable.
- And, His journey is really not that much different from ours.
- Ecclesiastes is a book that appears hopelessly pessimistic, but really offers blunt realism and incredible wisdom.
- It asks and answers the question: "What is the point of life?"

I am going to provide a sweeping overview of the book by looking at the opening and closing statements of the book. We are going to discover an enticing invitation to . . .

The Point: Find daily fulfillment by aligning your life [our lives] with God's glorious design.

I realize many of you may be new to the Bible. Some may be skeptical. Others have read it cover to cover many times. Here's my ask: Consider the plausibility of what I'm saying as we consider two overarching encouragements: #1.

I. Recognize life under the sun is pointless and yields no ultimate profit apart from God (1:1-3).

The first three verses set the tone for the entire book. They introduce us to the main character, his shocking assessment of the meaning of life, and what he is after in all of this. *Read 1-3...*

The Preacher

- Verse one tells we are reading “the words,” of “The Preacher.” Or Teacher. He is one who stands before a crowd to impart wisdom. We discover he is “the Son of David, [who was Israel’s greatest] king.”
- Whether Solomon, who was David’s son and immediate successor to the throne, wrote this, or it was penned later through his perspective, we have someone supreme in wisdom and whose experiences surpass all who came before him.
- In other words, he has the authority to speak on this topic, because he’s seen all life has to offer.
- His shocking assessment of life is found in **verse 2**.

His Assessment of Life: Vanity

- Verse 2: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” There is his thesis statement of life.
- He uses the most extreme words he can find. “Vanity of vanities...” Did you catch that? Ev-ree-thing... It is *all* vanity.
- Vanity here does not refer to excessive pride.
- The word *vanity* is the Hebrew word *hebel*. It is used over *30 times* in the book. Translated literally, it would be “mist” or “vapor,” which can communicate a deep array of ideas depending on the context: “Vanity” can refer to that which is fleeting or ephemeral, futile, enigmatic, unreasonable, worthless, empty, and pointless.
- Some translations say “meaningless.” One OT scholar says we could even take him to be saying “Life is absurd. Absurdity of absurdities. Everything is absolutely absurd.”
- Life as he sees it is “an affront to reason.” He’s seen it all and it doesn’t add up!
- That was his assessment, and that was his dilemma, *and if* he is correct, it is our dilemma as well. But...

What is he after? The payoff...

- In verse 3, we find the question driving his whole quest, “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun.” “What does man gain?” “Gain” here carries the idea of making a profit.
- The Preacher is thirsty for the payoff. We almost hear him saying: “There’s gotta be something to show from all of our endeavor in life. All of our busyness, all of our work.
- At the end of the day, *at the end of our life*, what do we have to show for it? Is there any fulfillment, any satisfaction?

- We all look for “the payoff,” don’t we? Not the roughly \$50M Johnny Depp will bring in playing Whitey Bulger in *Black Mass* (hits theaters Friday). I’m talking about the bank account of your life. What adds value to the bottom line??
- Some seek to accumulate satisfaction through relationships and acceptance, others pleasure or possessions. Some may define value by comfort and security; prestige and accomplishments, titles and degrees
- What about you? Are you looking for any of those pursuits to provide the ultimate payoff?
- Most people live life under the false assumption that... *their life would be complete, if I only had* more ____ (you fill in the blank) more money, more fun, greater abilities, a better job, a nicer family.
- The Preacher played that game, and he lost every time! He was never satisfied!!

He tried everything “under the sun.” That phrase, “under the sun,” speaks to life in this fallen world.

- Wisdom. (having all the answers)
- Pleasure
- Sexual experiences (without limit)

- Accomplishments
- Possessions (property, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, treasure)
- Work (finding your identity in your job, becoming a workaholic, won't deliver.)
- Leisure & Entertainment
- Power & Reputation
- Wealth & Riches
- Family & Long life

*This guy could have been a modern day rapper with all of his exploits and bling and women. It was on to the next experience and the one after that and the one after that.

And we are not that different. **Proverbs 27:20 - "Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of men."**

- Seeking ultimate satisfaction in any of these pursuits is an exercise in futility.
- Look at verse 14 of chapter 1: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." Picture that!!
- Are you chasing the wind? Are any of these areas keeping you from God or hindering your relationship with God?
- Think about it: there is not one thing on this list inherently evil. Idolatry takes a good thing and makes it a god-thing.
- That girl begins to dominate our thoughts. That desire for \$\$ begins alter our values. The esteem of our peers and superiors becomes more important than what God thinks of us. Our pursuit of pleasure pushes God to the margins of our lives.

T: BUT . . . Here's the good news: we were made to live for more than what our eyes can see. That is what the Preacher sums up for us so beautifully at the end of this book. To understand Ecclesiastes we really need to begin with the end. Renowned novelist & poet, Jim Harrison, made this point when he said, "The answer is always in the entire story, not just a piece of it."

Let's fast forward to *Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*. The author ends by exhorting us to . . .

II. Find the point of life by fearing God and keeping his commands (12:13-14).

The human heart has a relentless capacity to chase glory. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says, "**he has put eternity into man's heart.**"

Our quest for satisfaction reveals this so clearly, but the Bible provides a reason for this. The *very first* page (Genesis 1) says we are made in God's image. We are made to know God in his infinite perfections and to reflect his glory by living like and enjoying him. We are made for glory: to see it, taste it, revel in it, and spread it. There is no greater purpose under the sun than this. . .

We are made for God. We discover our ultimate purpose under the sun when we look beyond the sun. Joy and fulfillment are found in the Creator, not his creation.

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." That's **C.S. Lewis**.

Here it is! Life is infused with meaning and purpose and significance and value when we reconnect with God's original design. To seek ultimate satisfaction in this life is like engineering Ph.Ds content to play with legos. We miss out on our potential to serve the common good and the joy that could be ours.

So how does this fit the argument of Ecclesiastes? Look at the first 2 words of 12:13: "Fear God."

Fear God.

- This gets at our perspective and vision. When we fear God, we see him for who he is. He deserves our utmost respect and devotion. We possess a sense of awe that moves us to LOVE.
- How do you acquire the fear of God? Acquire greater thoughts of God. He is far more holy and far more glorious and far more loving and far more merciful and far more just than we could ever imagine. Job 26:14...
- We begin to see that every human enjoyment, every human good is but a faint whisper of the oceanic depths of God's infinite greatness.
- Jonathan Edwards put it like this: **"The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the ocean."**
- We cannot find true happiness apart from him. A good meal, a good book, passionate love between a husband and wife these are all gifts from God, but they are also scattered beams designed to point us to the sun.
- Do not be content with the beams and the streams when God offers the very substance we long for, the gift of himself.

Fear God and Keep His Commands.

- The order is important here: fear God *and* keep his commandments. The one should naturally flow from the other. "Fear" is the "soul of godliness" (Murray).
- To follow God's commands is a recovery of everything we were made for in the beginning.
- We must not reduce this to a few do's and don'ts. Keeping God's commands means loving him and loving our neighbor in every sphere of our lives.
- This is what I love about following Christ. Every moment matters.
- Every moment is an opportunity to fulfill whatever God places before us.

This vision can completely flip the script on how we live each day. You say, "Talk to me, Tanner" - I'm talking.. :)

- The next mundane task at work and the next conversation with a friend carries eternal weight.
- Now we live each day with consistent anticipation. I mean, who walks through life with humble confidence that they can impact people's lives, brighten their day, and possibly even alter the course of their eternity?
- Who does that? The person who aligns their with God's glorious design!
- God made us for that, and when we line up with that vision, we are freed from boredom and feelings of emptiness and we are freed to find fulfillment in ev-er-ree-thing! Wow!

T: That's why he goes on to say

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This is the whole duty of man.

- It does not get any stronger than this. Not just a good idea. Not an option to embrace when we want.
- Our "whole duty." Our LIFE. Our reason for being. Our job.
- Any Patriots fans out there? Man, Brady looked good Thursday night) He was out there doing his job. "Do your job." - Bellicheck. God already said that. :) This is our job.
- This is how "we fulfill our humanity."
- For everyone who connects their story to God's story through Jesus, we are being remade into the image of God. We are becoming who God made us to be in the beginning: man fully reflecting God's glory. That is what it means to be truly human.
- That is why **Irenaeus** said: **"The glory of God is the human being fully alive."**

T: God made us to know him (fear God), live for him (keep his commands) and glorify him (the whole duty of man). This must be our greatest motivation in life, but there is one more. Because God made us, we are accountable to him. Look at v. 14

Judgment

- Verse 14. "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."
- God will summon each of our deeds. We will give an account for every moment of our lives, even the secret areas no human eye sees, whether good or evil.
- Are you ready to give an account of your life before God? The only way we can be prepared is through Christ. He took the judgment that we deserved on the cross. He died so that we might live on the cross.
- *The gospel prepares us for judgment...* Are you ready to stand before God?

Because of God's love for us in Christ, we are invited to a completely satisfying life under the sun, and a completely satisfying life beyond the sun, beyond life as we know it, in the new heavens and new earth.

This all happens because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Conclusion:

Have you ever considered how Ecclesiastes sounds so much like Jesus in the gospel. The question of Ecclesiastes 1:3 ("what does man gain from all his toil under the sun"), is very similar to a question Jesus posed to those who wanted to follow him. **"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 16:26)**

We could put the theology of Ecclesiastes overtop these words of Jesus and it would go something like this: "Listen I know you are searching for meaning and satisfaction in life. I know you've tried so many different pursuits, but you've come up empty handed every time. Follow me. For whoever would seek to find ultimate meaning in the empty pursuits of this life, that person is going to lose it all!, but whoever would lose his life by abandoning the pursuit of finding meaning this world apart from me, you will save it, you will find it, for in finding me you find it all. "I am the bread of life. I will give you water and you will never thirst again. I am the treasure you've always longed for. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the point of it all!"