

Reading Schedule for July 2-8, 2018

We return to the Old Testament with a sense of fascination about the Book of Ecclesiastes. My previous experience in this book reminds me that life is empty apart from God. Whether we try to find meaning in our possessions, power, or pleasure, they will lead to disappointment and even despair. We don't get to the conclusion until the very end as we wade through the various things that are empty and meaningless when we try to find our identity in them.

July 2 - Ecclesiastes 1: "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem." (v.1)

It is important to give an introduction to this book as chapter one is introductory. We know the author to be Solomon, who is known to the wisest man who ever lived. Near the end of his life, looking back on everything he had done, he saw that most of it seemed meaningless. The common belief was that good people prospered, and the wicked suffered, but that hadn't proven true in Solomon's experience. Solomon is one person in the Bible who had everything – wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation, and, in a sense, God's favor. Solomon wants his readers to avoid the senseless pursuits of trying to find meaning apart from God. How do you respond to this first chapter?

July 3 - Ecclesiastes 2: "For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune." (v.21) This seems to affirm the fact that Solomon wrote this later in life. Working hard could be a blessing, but it is empty if it is only about earning money and gaining possessions. He sees all that he has accumulated, and when he dies it will be passed on to others who won't appreciate the significance of hard work. Hard work done with proper motives, like providing for your family and serving God is not wrong, of course. But the fruit of hard work done to glorify only ourselves will be passed on to those who may later lose or spoil it. Such toil often leads to grief, while serving God leads to real joy. How do you respond to the importance of working?

July 4 - Ecclesiastes 3: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." (v.11) This is the most profound verse of this chapter, but the most famous verses are ones that were written to a song by Simon & Garfunkel. But the profound truth that God has set eternity in the hearts of men, brings meaning to everything that Solomon is saying. This means we can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits. This is because we are created in God's image. We have a desire for eternal meaning. God has built in us a restless yearning for the kind of perfect world that can only be found in heaven. But if we can live with heaven in mind on earth, even the hardest things can prove to be meaningful. I am glad we are reading this chapter on the 4th of July. It is really pointing to the purpose of life. How do you respond to this crucial chapter in Solomon's book about life?

July 5 - Ecclesiastes 4: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor . . ." (v.9) This is the beginning of a section that I often refer to in a wedding. The Lord has a purpose in marriage, and one of the primary reasons is partnership. Even in the Genesis account, the woman was called a helpmate. I appreciate the emphasis on friendship, on supporting each other, and even the

significance of a cord of three strands, putting God right in the center of that relationship. These verses apply to relationships beyond marriage, as friendship is a gift from God. Life is designed for companionship and linking arms with others in the pursuits of life. Don't isolate yourself or try to go it alone. Seek friendship. Be a team player. These verses are ones that inspire me the most. What inspires you the most from this chapter?

July 6 - Ecclesiastes 5: "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." (v.2) I am drawn to this verse because I am reminded of a song that has similar words when we worship God – let your words be few. When we enter into the presence of God intentionally, we want to be ready to listen as much as we are drawn to speak. It is important to emphasize worship in the context of prayer. So often prayer is limited to telling God what you want him to do. How about emphasizing adoration in your prayers even more than supplication?! That's what I think Solomon is getting at in this first paragraph of our reading today. Stand in awe of God. I like these first few verses because they are emphasizing something that I need to emphasize in my life more so. I do not want to promise God things. I want to tell him how much I appreciate his promises. How do you respond to the message about being in awe of God?

July 7 - Ecclesiastes 6: "For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?" (v.12) I hope you are enjoying these readings as much as I am. Even though the message is challenging, and can appear to be pessimistic, it is pointing us to what really satisfies. Solomon is stating the profound truth that we cannot predict what the future holds. In a roundabout way, he is telling us to have an eternal perspective. As we engage in the experiences of life, remember that our duration on earth is relatively short. He is suggesting that we give our plans to God, knowing that we will one day be ushered into eternity. Is there something in this chapter that especially catches your eye? Why? How might you respond to Solomon's counsel?

July 8 - Ecclesiastes 7: "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future." (v.14) This reminds me of Romans 8:28, as the Apostle Paul promises us that God works all things out for the good of those who love him. God allows both good times and bad times to come to everyone. He blends them into our lives in such a way that we can't predict the future or count on human wisdom and power. We usually give ourselves the credit for the good times; but in bad times we tend to blame God without thanking him for the good that comes out of it. You know that God may allow bad times in your life to drive you back to him. When life seems uncertain and unpredictable, it reminds us that God is in control and that we can trust him. There is much wisdom in this chapter. What piece of wisdom helped you as you read through this chapter?

PRAYER: It seems appropriate to pray for our country as we celebrate the 4th of July. I encourage you to pray for our president, and all those who are in leadership positions in our government.