

Read Ecclesiastes 1

That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. so there is nothing new under the sun. Eccl 1:9

I was a freshman in college, when a new friend of mine introduced me to his new found source of cash. He was selling phone cards, which were really big at the time because you didn't have a large group of people with cell phones. The idea was not only to sell the phone cards, but to get other people to sell them. You would get a cut of the sales of the people you later recruited, and he had been making real money to prove it. My dad called it a pyramid scheme, and I didn't really know what that was. Eventually the money and the company dried up and I saw Dad was right. Years later someone offered me a chance to make money selling a larger variety of items. I quickly realized I was looking at the same pyramid scheme, just with different components. I remembered the first lesson and kept my money.

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his later years. He had more wisdom than anyone who ever lived on the earth, and yet he still had plenty of unwise decisions scattered behind him. And one of the great warnings that Solomon gives is that there's nothing new under the sun. As the internet has become more a part of our lives, it has brought as many problems as solutions. We now have online identity theft, child predators, and online pornography. But really, the methods may have changed, but these aren't new sins. People have been robbing each other, targeting the innocent, and finding new forms of perversion for centuries. **You need to take a close look at your life. The Bible may not speak specifically to the sin your in (don't look at internet pornography), but the principles are clearly in Scripture (do not commit adultery). Are you finding new ways to simply do the same old thing? Ask God to help you see through the methods to examine what's really going on behind the scenes in your life. Satan doesn't invent anything, he simply repackages old sins for a new generation.**

Read Ecclesiastes 2

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. Eccl 2:18

Back in high school, "No Fear" brand t-shirts were very popular. They had all kinds of sayings that were supposed to relate to life and competition. I bought one, mostly because tons of other people had them, which said, "Life is just sudden-death overtime. And the clock is running." Sounds pretty good until my dad said, "There's no clock in sudden-death overtime. Whoever scores first wins." Well that killed the excitement of my \$16.00 purchase pretty quickly. One of my favorite "No Fear" sayings was a shirt I saw at school one day, "He who dies with the most toys, still dies." I wondered if the kid wearing it was a Christian or if he even got the depth of that statement.

Solomon would certainly have related to this shirt. He has started to realize that so much of what he chased after was vanity. He compares it to chasing the wind, something you can spend all day doing and never accomplish. In verse 18, Solomon realizes that after all

his work is over that it will just go to the next guy. No matter if the next king is wise or an idiot, it will all be his. I hear athletes say that sometimes they pushed for a bigger contract because they wanted to take care of their children's children. I can see that line of thinking, but what kind of children do you think will be produced if they have unearned access to millions of dollars? **What will you be leaving behind when you die? Are you trying to build up an inheritance for your family, that may be appreciated for a while, but can corrupt as easily as ill-gotten gain? I want to give my children something, but I don't want them to forget their responsibility to work so that they can eat. I probably won't leave my children much money after I die, but I hope that I am leaving them with something of greater value: the testimony of a life lived for Jesus Christ. What inheritance are you leaving behind for those you love? Will it profit them or pollute them?**

Read Ecclesiastes 3

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven Eccl 3:1

I had a college friend named Susannah who taught me a very important lesson. I was thinking about replacing my old car and couldn't decide between a sporty Ford Probe or a Honda Accord wagon. I was only 20 at the time, but I knew that I was going to buy a car I would probably have for a while. I thought the wagon was a smart buy in the event I had a family in the near future. Susannah said that we have seasons of life, just as Solomon is saying here. She said that I may need to think about a family in the future, but this wasn't that time. I didn't need to buy a wagon if I don't even have a pregnant wife running around. She was absolutely right, but I ended up just fixing my old car and not getting anything new.

We have seasons in our lives. We have a season of childhood, in which children of each following generation seem more and more successful at skipping. We have a season of singleness which is a great time for us to serve the Lord with no strings attached. And eventually we may have a season of marriage in our lives. But even more than that, there are right times and wrong times for events. A baby is great in a marriage, and tough outside of one. We need to learn to be patient people, especially as Christians. God has us where He has us for a reason. There is no one in history who works with more planning and wisdom than God. **We need to be willing to remain content in our current circumstances. What is it that you want to see happen in your life? Have you talked to God about it, or are you just pushing for it yourself? Is now the right time for this event in your life? Let's remember that there is a time and place for everything. God wants you to know His will so you will do it. So pray that God will show you the moments to move in your life. Be ready for His timing, and always substitute His for your own.**

Read Ecclesiastes 4

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. Eccl 4:9

I'm not good at asking people for help. We were having a church cleanup day, and one member that I have been getting to know better asked if I needed help trimming the hedges. I hesitated to say yes, because I thought I could handle the work myself, and I didn't want him standing around waiting on me. But, he stayed and there ended up being a lot of work needed to pull the trimmings out of the hedge, getting it onto a tarp, and finally hauling it away. I told him thanks for helping me, because I realized if I had done it all on my own, it would have taken a much longer time.

Two are always better than one. It means twice the muscle, twice the wisdom, and half the time on most projects. Solomon is not just talking about a helpful laborer, but also talking about a marriage. A marriage is supposed to be two people becoming one, but I see enough marriages where it seems to be two people simply living in the same house. They don't work together, and sometimes actually work against each other. I think about the lessons my wife and I have learned over our marriage. Our marriage hasn't always been perfect, and it seems that we were both focused on ourselves more than the other person during those difficult moments. We weren't working together, so our labor was less fruitful. **If you are married, how are you working with your spouse to strengthen your relationship? Do you both teach and discipline the children? Are you both of the same mindset regarding financial matters in your home? You need to be working on the same team. And as an individual, are you too prideful to ask for help? Be willing to accept the help of others. And if they don't know the job as well as you, look at the opportunity you have to be a teacher to someone who needs it. God isn't looking for an army of one.**

Read Ecclesiastes 5

Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. Eccl 5:2

My pastor as a teenager said something stupid that stuck with me for years. He was talking about prayer one morning from the pulpit and he said, "Don't pray over and over for something. God heard you the first time and it insults Him to be bothered with the same request." Well this really got my attention because I thought about how many times I prayed more than once for a request. So for years, I tried to make sure that I never prayed for something more than once, because I didn't want to insult God and cause Him to ignore me. When we went to a new church, I learned that God wants to hear our prayers. Not just our requests, but our praise and confession as well. I read Luke 18 and saw the parable of the persistent widow who continued to bring her request before the judge until he finally get her an answer.

Let's go backwards on this verse. It says that because God is in heaven and we are on earth, that we should let our words be few. The first point being made is that we remember that God is not like us. Certainly we can call Him friend and are called friend by Him, but He is still God and worthy of reverence. We are not being warned about talking to God, but how we talk to God. Solomon says not to be hasty or impulsive in our prayers. Literally, the Hebrew word for impulsive here is "hurry your heart." If something

is important to you, spend time truly praying, and not just mouthing words towards heaven. Don't pray mindlessly trying to fit in your requests while you're thinking about something else. Pray with your attention fully devoted to God, but don't just talk to talk. God is not impressed by your ability to drag out your prayers. **How are you praying? Do you think about what or who you'd like to pray for before you do it? Do you simply ramble before God without much thought during? We need to make sure that we simply say to Him what needs to be said. But, let's offer up the whole prayer. Don't just make your requests known, but be a person of thankfulness and repentance as you lift up your requests. It shows that you have given thought to your prayers.**

Read Ecclesiastes 6

All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied. Eccl 6:7

Why do we eat and drink? We're just going to get hungry again. The food may only stick with us for a few hours, and then we'll start the entire cycle over again. Yet we have to remain in the cycle in order that we don't become weak, sick, or ultimately die. It's just like making our beds or cutting our lawns. We don't really want to do it, but we do it anyway just to find that it becomes a necessity all over again.

Solomon says the whole reason we work is so we won't starve, and yet we get hungry all over again. There are lots of areas in our lives like this. Why should we pray? Why should we eat? God wants us to understand diligence in our lives. There are things we want to do and then there are things we have to do. Eating is a requirement for us to continue living. But there are other appetites that must be satisfied as well. We should have an appetite and hunger for God. It's a hunger that is never satisfied, because we can never be completely filled by Him. **Are you trying to fulfill the appetites of the flesh more than the Spirit? We have an opportunity to build our relationship with God each and everyday. When we eat physical food, it simply burns off. But, when we eat the bread that is the Word of God, we are not only fed, but we grow. We are sustained by it. We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Which appetites are you putting in priority?**

Read Ecclesiastes 7

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. Eccl 7:20

As Christians we need to be careful about putting other Christians up on pedestals. I was watching on a local Christian TV station and saw two former televangelists who lost their ministries as a result of deep, deliberate, and egregious sin. And now, here they are back in the spotlight as if nothing ever happened. We are to be forgiving people, because Jesus Christ has forgiven us. However, these men disqualified themselves from the ministry when they made the choices for sin that were lived out in the public eye. People that follow these men probably would say they are men of righteousness who were just caught in a weak moment, which ignores God's standards on a teacher of the Word.

As Christians our righteousness comes from Jesus. He makes us clean of our sins and puts us in a right standing with the Father. However, we still find ourselves to be sinners who now struggle against sin. You might think you're the worst sinner ever, but Paul even thought that about himself. Recognizing your sin is not a bad thing. Ignoring your sin is. Even the most public and adored Christian in the world is a sinner. We have to understand that sin is still a part of our makeup and that as a Christian we have a responsibility and obligation to fight against it. **Have you recognized the sin that's in your life right now? What are you doing about it? Are you praying for God to remove it with no active participation on your part? Everyone sins, but not everyone fights against the sin in their lives. It pleases God when we choose to live the opposite of the world who accepts and invites sin into their lives.**

Read Ecclesiastes 8

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. Eccl 8:11

People will tend to do what they believe they can get away with. I certainly am no expert with children, but I have been doing this long enough to learn what happens when I threaten punishment and when I bring punishment. My favorite example was a pastor who said that the "three count" isn't effective. What if your kid runs out in the street and all you're doing is counting. "One...two...BOOM!" I don't think any of us would allow our kids to take the risk of a three count in the street, but many parents have lost their authority with their children. Once you tell a kid that a certain action brings a certain punishment, he's going to wait and see if it happens. If it doesn't, then he's not going to be very concerned by your efforts to restrain him in the future.

We may be in our 20's, 30's or greater, but we are all still children. We have our childish moments of selfishness when we want what we want in spite of what the consequences might be. So often we see people get away with it and we wonder, "Can I?" Divorce is said to be terrible on families, but maybe you see a remarried couple who seems so happy. They don't seem to be paying a price, so we wonder if we can get away with it. A fellow employee is getting away with stealing from the company by being dishonest about his work hours and we wonder, "Can I?" **God calls on us for a different level of integrity. We don't avoid sin because we think we might be punished. We avoid sin because God does. We are to be like Him, and God's blessings don't fall upon those who didn't get caught. They fall upon those who struggled against sin and won. What sins are you risking the punishment for? When we take chances long enough, eventually those chances catch up to us and cause us great embarrassment and pain. Don't ask if you can get away with it, whatever "it" is for your life. Ask what the benefit will be for you when you avoid the sin altogether.**

Read Ecclesiastes 9

The words of the wise heard in quietness are *better* than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Eccl 9:17

US Airways Flight 1549 is an amazing story of a captain, Chesley Sullenberger, who stayed calm in the middle of a potential disaster. His plane engines apparently hit birds and caused the plane to go down. With no other options, he told the tower that he would ditch in the Hudson river. He expertly glided the plane onto the water while avoiding crowded bridges, and his calmness and professionalism translated to his entire crew. They worked to make sure all 155 passengers got off the plane safely, and Sullenberger remained until everyone was off the plane.

Can you imagine if Sullenberger ran out of the cockpit and yelled, "The plane's going down! Every man for himself!" Instead he calmly spoke both to the control tower and to the people in the plane to let them know what was happening. A large crowd like that often panics together, but one calm voice clearly in control allowed the people to remain calm and trust that he was making the wisest choices possible. Sullenberger was listened to because he was a wise voice in a "loud" situation. Imagine if doomsayers and the voices of frightened people had taken control? The situation probably would have been much different. **Do you listen for the wise voice, or do you find yourself sometimes just listening to the loudest one? As a Christian we need to listen for the wise voice, and be the wise voice. Talking loudest doesn't qualify our positions as the best. God desires to speak through you, but you have to make even your lips a vessel for Him. We need to realize that when we remain calm in a difficult situation, we show that we have a reliance and trust on God. The fool yells with no hope, but the Christian knows that God is in control of the most out of control situation. Do you people rely on your faith in difficult circumstances, or does your voice sound just as hopeless as the lost? Being a Christian has made me an optimist in pessimistic situations.**

Read Ecclesiastes 10

If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. Eccl 10:11

When I was in my first youth ministry, we had a clown ministry team made up of about 10 youth from our group. They were really good. We had some kids that could juggle, make balloon animals, and one who could do amazing things with yo-yos. While we went out on a trip to YMCA children's day camp, a kid who wasn't a regular asked to come. I was impressed with our kids who said yes, mostly because they were trying to get him plugged into the group as a whole. When it came time for them to put on their show, here was this new kid that was painted like a clown, but clearly didn't have the talent. I think the little kids thought he was the funny clown because he kept missing the balls he was juggling. It was pretty clear he was trying to take on something he wasn't ready for.

This verse reminds me of snake charmers I've seen on TV, and I must say it seems like a particularly ignorant occupation. I have learned that it is not the music that registers with these snakes, but it is the swaying of the charmer himself. Imagine a novice snake charmer who came up and tried to charm a cobra without really know what he was doing. There's a good chance that snake is going to bite him in the face. Solomon is simply warning us against being ill-prepared. **s. If you're not prepared on how to handle a sin situation before it appears, you will likely fail. For teenagers it may be opportunities**

to cheat at school. For adults it may be temptation to cheat on a spouse. There are lots of traps out there that have been set by Satan to ruin our witness and our families. We need to pray and ask God to give you wisdom to see the sin that is crouching at your door. Ask God to protect you from those traps and to give you the spiritual discernment to see the sin right away.

Read Ecclesiastes 11

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. Eccl 11:9

I was a freshman college when I made a firm decision to no longer look absent-mindedly at women. If a woman was not properly dressed, I decided to put the responsibility on myself not to look, instead of on her to be better dressed. Over the years since that decision, I have found myself watching other guys when a girl walks into a room. You have guys that will glance up and some that will simply stare at the woman until she is no longer in their sights or until it's no longer appropriate to do so. I have been disappointed greatly as I watched many men and friends I respected give not a glance but instead stare at a woman for a long time.

The Bible here is not giving permission to lust after people or possessions. Solomon says that the impulses of our hearts are easy. We are often distracted from our budgets by a must-have item, or perhaps there is that person we long after from afar. Solomon says that you certainly have the opportunity to follow your heart and your eyes at any moment. Solomon's reminder is that in doing these things, you bring judgment upon yourself. A Christian is saved from all sins as a result of the blood of Jesus. However, Revelation 20 tells us about the Great White Throne judgment. This will not determine Heaven or Hell for you, because that is determined at your death based on what you did with Jesus. This judgment is a determination of the level of punishment in Hell or reward in Heaven. **The Christian will give an accounting for every careless word and careless glance that was cast out. What's behind us is behind us, and there is no way to change it. But, do you want to live your life ignoring the accounting to come? I know that God will have much more in my life to be displeased by than to be pleased. That's why I have made firm decisions in my life to resist sin. I don't always win, but I live in light of eternity. I fear God and have respect for His ownership on my life.**

Read Ecclesiastes 12

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. Eccl 12:13

The hardest part of preaching or teaching the Bible is making it applicable to everyone. Just recently our pastor preached on idols and I thought, "Nice. Here is a sermon that others need to hear, but not me. I know that I don't have idols in my life." So when his sermon was over, I was of course repenting of my idols. However, not every topic meets every person where he or she is at. Messages on marriage may be disregarded by the

single, and messages on children may be disregarded by the childless. There is application for everyone, but some subjects are tougher than others.

Here in Ecclesiastes 12 we find something that applies to every person. If you were to live your life having heard everything possible, the purpose of life comes down to one statement: fear God and keep His commandments. There is not a single person that will die who can ignore this standard. God is responsible for our very lives, and we are responsible to live our lives for Him accordingly. People who live out their years never acknowledging God or His commandments will not get a pass. God's Word applies to the hearers and non-hearers alike. **Do you realize that your lost family and friends will not get a pass in Heaven? The message of God's Word isn't just for those who care, but for those who don't. I'm thankful that someone came and shared the message with me when I wasn't even asking to hear it. After everything I've heard, the conclusion of my life is that I should fear God and keep His commandments. He has a standard of holiness and my life has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ to meet that standard. Are there any other messages from the Bible that you've been unwilling to apply to yourself? His Word is for everyone, and no one is exempt. Jesus said His friends would be those who would keep His commandments (John 14:15). Not because we work our way to Heaven, but because we love Him enough to respect the salvation we have been given.**