

On **Friday** we all watched amazing video of the tsunami waves wash over Northern Japan..... It was so **surreal** for me....b/c when I first began to watch... it seemed to be happening so slowly..... that it almost did not seem like an emergency....

It looked more like some pretend scenario the kids had made as they played in rain puddles the day before in the back yard...

That, of course, is because we were viewing these scenes from an **aerial** perspective.....

Did you see that one part of the clip where cars are going along a highway as the wave approached..... Didn't you find yourself wishing you could tell them where to turn and how fast to go?.....

It was an entirely different experience, however, for the folks on the ground....

At **ground level**..... facing the onslaught of a 30 ft. high wall of water pushing everything it has touched in front of it like a giant bulldozer.....is quite a **different** scene.....

CNN.com at one point had their footage accompanied by **piano** music.....so that the destruction looked like some dramatic interpretive dance....

No soothing piano music, however, ..... was playing at ground level.....

Only the ROAR of rushing destruction... the shrieks of fear .....chaos....pain... and finally **death**..... for anyone who had not heeded the warnings ahead of time....

Undoubtedly.... that is (to some degree) what life feels like for some of you... right now.

**No AERIAL view** of what is happening to you... seems to exist to help you MAKE SENSE of everything it seems you are being hit with.....

Thankfully.... if you have a Bible.... God has given you a storehouse of WISDOM... through which to interpret the events of your life.....

But one part of His WISDOM is **not** an aerial view at all.....by design....

It is a book written by a man..... who intentionally chose to spend part of his life..... EXPLORING what life was like when lived AT GROUND LEVEL....

Or as he calls it.... "life under the sun."

I am referring to the book of **Ecclesiastes** which we are beginning a study of today.

I venture to guess that a good many of you have never read it..... because as you try... it seems strangely **out of sync** with the rest of the God centered perspective of the Bible.....

That is by design..... And it is precisely **why** we are going to study it....

Ecclesiastes is a REPORT (almost like reading from the **journal**) of one man's attempt to make sense out of LIFE... at ground level.

In other words... Ecclesiastes is a description of LIFE viewed (at least in temporary segments) **apart from** the understanding that there is a GOD...

who is holding all things together and Who has purposes and plans we can't understand....but Who has told us that we can TRUST Him to work them ALL together for our good....

It is truly the story of a man who went to the edge and looked down..... and has now come to share His findings with you.....

You should LISTEN and take heed.....because even though His **quest** did not involve digital communication..... or jet travel..... or the use of the internet.....

His whole life was **divinely appointed** by God to EXPLORE to the fullest degree.....the exact **SAME dead end streets** Satan tries to convince you are the WAY to happiness and satisfaction.....

- SO THAT.... you don't **have** to!

So that you don't waste your life **chasing empty dreams**.... that will burst on you and leave the enemy laughing at your stupidity.....

This man has been sent ahead of YOU..... with **unlimited resources**.... as a **timeless SCOUT**.....

An **intel** gatherer (if you will).....into what we now call .... the American Dream.....the good life!

To bring you back a well informed report....and a WISE conclusion.... that can PREVENT much heartache and emptiness in your life.....

That is **sobering**, and humbling Christian.... if you will take it in.....

In His Sovereignty, God appointed Solomon, the Son of David....the darling of Israel.....to **LIVE life** at the **top of the heap**.....

To have all the time, money and luxury anyone could want.....

And then to have him spend MOST of his adult life..... WANDERING about **in** those luxuries..... doing what was right in his own eyes.....

Trying to mesh together a **new worldview**....based on what he EXPERIENCED combined with what he already believed to be true.....  
(largely as a **humanist** would today).....

**Only** to have him finally **CIRCLE back** to his Biblical roots in the end...and bring you THIS report of what he found....

I urge you.... to HEED His advice..... so you don't have to make that **wasted trip!**

Read this book on your own..... several times over if you can.....

At first it might perplex you.... because he is trying to build a **WORLDLY** life on a Biblical foundation.... but instead of being the good life..... the prosperity gospel.....he had hoped for...

He ends up **more MISERABLE** more confused than he was before..... He discovers..... what I want to be in the forefront of your mind each and every day.....

**All** is EMPTY..... everything is meaningless..... without GOD... and His gospel..... His WISDOM functioning DAILY at the core of your reality.....

Whether you are young (which most of your life ahead of you)... or old (not knowing how many days or years you have left)....somewhere in between...

We all need this WISDOM....to keep us on course.....

Many of you know.... that is the Biblical truth God used to arrest me in 1988...

I was 26 years old.... and living on 63<sup>rd</sup> St. at Va. Beach. My worldview was very simple: **Surf everyday** (if possible) and enjoy to every moment of life to the fullest. I knew that living for money like my co-workers were doing was pointless.....

But I too was empty.....my **adolescent fantasy** had worn thin....I knew I needed something.....but I had no clue what to do...

It was just a normal night after work.... I was alone in my bedroom watching a surfing special on ESPN.....

In the middle of all the epic footage of Pipeline.... the man who had won the championship the year before came on and said:

“ I have experienced everything good in life.... I have surfed 30 ft. waves.... had all the women I could want..... and I have discovered that **all is vain**... all is empty without Jesus and without God.”

Immediately when he said that.... the Holy Spirit brought conviction over me with a bang. I felt like someone had taken one of those rubber mallets they use to do body work on cars... and hit me over the head with it.....

I bowed down right there in my room and said.... OK God.... I'll follow you.

I woke up the next morning went to work..... but the music from the CD I had in the night before..... was no longer appealing to me..... it just **rubbed in** that empty lie I had been sucked into believing....

I got to work and on my lunch hour went and bought a Bible at a drugstore.....

Began to read the gospel of Matthew.....could not get enough.....

I couldn't bring myself to tell my mother she had been right all those years.....

But she began to catch on when her wayward surfer son began asking questions about Scripture.....

For you young people..... God does not want you taking an **unnecessary** and painful foray into a meaningless existence in the WORLD.....

Your flesh will tempt you every day to turn aside and explore this **scenic** route..... to try and find out how it feels to experience the **exotic**.... even the forbidden....

Instead of going there.....

Accompany Solomon as he does and find out through **His** experience... just what the path of **MAXIMUM joy** is for you....

Even though life doesn't look like it on the surface.... Solomon circles back at the end of the book to say that **THIS** is the best... the most fulfilling plan for life:

### **Ecclesiastes 12:13**

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for **this** is the whole duty of man."

Look at this verse.... and think about what life would be like right now if **Adam** had somehow been able to **chat** with Solomon before Eve showed up with her invitation to break God's command and explore life on the **wild side**??

That is the exact same TRUTH God told Adam in the first place and the same truth they set aside to follow Satan's lie....

And nothing has changed....what Satan offered to Eve is precisely what he offers to you..... Come on....

God is holding you back! Come check out **the knowledge of both good and evil on your own!** Come live life at GROUND level and forget all this faith in God stuff.....

Believe in YOURSELF.....You are missing out!

Solomon says no! Trust me, you're **not**.... been there, done that! NOT worth it!

Instead **receive** this GIFT of God's WISDOM.....(these instructions and warnings issued from God's **AERIAL** perspective)

**Receive** the truth of God's Word implanted which is able to save your soul.... **IF** you make the fear of the LORD the LENS through which you view all of reality..... and by faith in Him walk according to His commandments....

no matter what the WORLD the flesh and devil peddle before you as an **allurement** to do otherwise....

I believe the Lord led us to study this book because it is FULL of wisdom we need here in 2011.

It is part of what has been called the **Heart** of the Old Testament (wisdom literature)...

Whereas... Proverbs (also written by Solomon) is wisdom for the ambitious.... True Nuggets from God.... that you can use as a foundation for your future ....

- The Song of Solomon.... is wisdom for married couples..... a passionate fleshing out of what Christ's **eternal love** for His Bride looks like between husband and wife...

- **Psalms** are songs of prayer and praise..... communication to God as lived in relationship with Him through His Son.....

But (as Mark Dever puts it) - Ecclesiastes is wisdom aimed at the **successful**.....

People who have at least tasted enough of their DREAMS..... and looked down..... and said....I **still feel empty**..... isn't there something more?

You have probably heard about Tom Brady's interview on 60 minutes a number of years ago where he was asked: Tom, you have **3** Super Bowl rings....you were voted most eligible bachelor in the country last year..... what's next for you?

And he immediately said....I don't know, but there **MUST** be something more...

That is not unique to Mr. Brady..... he is just one of the few who is HONEST enough to admit it.....

The American Dream of SUCCESS.... **always** leaves you empty.

So Ecclesiastes.... is actually the IDEAL launching pad for the gospel for us here in our culture....

I pray it will serve each of you in that capacity..... that you will find Solomon's **frustration** with life the way it is .....a means of **ALERTING** you.... as you wrestle with the harsh realities of life under the curse... that you need to (like a little child) keep on running back into the truth of the gospel as the REFRESHING good news out of which you live.....

You were in the mass of this **flotsam** called humanity that was being swept away with the tidal wave towards hell.... and **God sent His Son** .....to rescue you....

To pay your **RANSOM**....on the cross.....to be raised from the DEAD on your behalf....

So that (even in the midst of a cursed world) you could BELIEVE in and ENJOY His **forgiving love**.... and His empowering presence....

As you wait for Jesus to return....and try to used of God to rescue others along the way...

WARNING: (as you read Ecclesiastes) : Remember that what is recorded here are the **true** feelings... the actual responses to a man that experienced the things he is writing about....

He is not playing a game.....

So Solomon gets blatantly honest in the midst of his frustration..... He calls it like he sees it.....from his GROUND LEVEL perspective.....

when life STINKS... he says so....

But go with him..... even let his Words become your own as you experience those same emotions.... so that you can run back into the arms of the ULTIMATE Son of David....Jesus Christ.....

Let's read what He inspired Solomon to record for us in Eccles. 1:1-11....

This first section forms the prologue to the book... it sets the stage for all the themes he is going to address.... and it has been assembled for us....

### **Ecclesiastes 1:1**

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

The book is named after the **title** given to its author. Here that title is translated Preacher... because that is its original meaning in Hebrew.... someone who leads an assembly....

The Greek word for **assembly** (same word NT writers use for the church) is **Ecclesia**...

So Ecclesiastes (in Latin) is the word for Preacher... the leader of an assembly...

Puritan John Trapp (Spurgeons favorite commentator) said it goes a step farther  
Saying the Hebrew connotes...the meaning of a soul REUNITED to the church.... and  
mercifully given the office of proclaiming the truth to them..... like Peter was after he  
fell.

Some modern scholars point out that this book is actually **anonymous** (because  
Solomon's proper name is not used like it is in Proverbs and the Song of Solomon) but  
in my study I am convinced the evidence is sufficient to affirm Solomon as this King of  
Israel.... (see 1:12) who was wealthier than any who had come before him... (but I am  
happy to discuss that with you afterwards if you like)

These are an assembly of his WORDS... His teachings... meant to be passed on to  
the gathered assembly... but applied individually to each of our lives...

He begins by stating the **central theme** of the book:

### **Ecclesiastes 1:2**

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

I was having a discussion with a gentleman this week.... to try and bridge to the  
gospel..... I began by talking about what I was studying here.....

But like most people in our society... he understood the word VANITY to mean  
**pride**....

That certainly is one definition of the English word....because pride (like vanity) is  
**devoid of substance**.....

But the Preacher is not addressing pride here .... He is using a very specific Hebrew  
word which we have had difficulty translating into English....

Literally the word = **vapor**... or the breath you can see in the cold of winter....

or the **cloud like mist** you find lingering on a cool morning after the sun has heated up  
the earth....

Everything is EMPTY!....

Nothing makes sense! Its utterly absurd ... because NOTHING **LASTS**....it is like a  
vapor.... like chasing after wind.

Certainly each and every one of you have felt that at one time or another...

### **Ecclesiastes 1:3**

"What does man **gain** by all the toil at which he toils **under the sun**?"

This phrase “under the sun” is used 28 times in Eccles. and no where else in the Bible....It is a **word picture** for looking at life from an earthbound perspective...

Picture Solomon.... or yourself.....walking around life... examining the various aspects of reality on a **horizontal plane**.....

This is our sphere of existence.....and the whole place is under a **CURSE**....

Even **work**.... which is a gift from God..... because of the curse of sin.... has turned into **TOIL**.... hard labor....

So that there is no ultimate **PROFIT**... in it.....nothing left to show.... for a lifetime of labor...

One of my uncles built a multi-million dollar business in Fla. over the past 60 years.... His oldest son died of Alzheimer’s about 10 years ago....and his other son is not interested in the business...

After losing two wives to cancer..... he is now in his 90’s living alone.... where he sleeps in his recliner in front of the TV for most of his days....

I can assure you he would affirm the truth Solomon points out here.....

What GAIN is there for ALL the work I put in?....

Remember the guy in Scripture....who (perhaps like some of you today) thought he had made enough PROFIT to make him SET for LIFE? He built bigger barns and said...

### **Luke 12:19-21**

"And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, '**Fool!** This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'"

No matter how hard you work.....(under the sun) all your toil will one day be washed away by the sting of death....

Depressing isn't it? That is why it is called a curse.

### **Psalm 90:10**

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but **toil and trouble**; they are soon gone, and we fly away."

Most of you have experienced the sting of death..... One of Solomon’s main themes in this book.... is how the fact that we all die..... makes everything we do while we are here... utterly **meaningless**....futile.....

Like a **vapor**.... disappearing under the morning sun.

**Ecclesiastes 1:4**

"A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

We are **TRANSIENTS**.... just passing through....

Jerome helps us understand the **irony** here.... because the earth was created to be man's habitat.... with mankind being its ruler.....her crown jewel.. yet her rulers – one generation after another – **dissolve** into the dust while it is **the earth** itself that appears to be the only thing permanent....

Even in its relative permanence (compared to man).... **nature itself** seems caught in a wearisome cycle with no purpose...

**Ecclesiastes 1:5-7**

"The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again."

You can see here.... how natural man (without the Revelation of God) comes up with the doctrine of **reincarnation**.....

Nature itself APPEARS to have **no linear** purpose.....

We don't seem to be headed **anywhere**..... All forms of life are caught up in one vicious cycle....

So Eastern religions naturally try to make sense out of our lives by dreaming up that **people must be cyclical too**....

Satan dupes them to stay in an endless cycle of meaninglessness..... eagerly striving to find meaning through meditation and yoga...and self denial.

Even with all the supposed PROGRESS we seem to be making as a human race....

The very design of our bodies and our nature **screams** at us that there **MUST** be more than just what we can see and hear....

**Ecclesiastes 1:8**

"All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

Have you ever taken time to wonder why your **eye candy** never satisfies your soul?

..... Why is it that your flesh tells you that the best way to relax is just to sit down and watch a favorite show on TV.... and then.... when the show is over..... you immediately ask... **what else** is on?

Our eyes and ears are NEVER satisfied! They never say ENOUGH, I'm good now... let's do something else...

And they won't be until we behold the ONE in eternity **we were created to SEE**.....

But on the horizontal plane.....when we just think about life in the here and now...

These thoughts are so depressing.... we don't even want to talk about them....

And so we **don't**. Have you not noticed that in our culture?

You are not supposed to discuss NEGATIVE things....

Even in Christian circles.....

Next time you are feeling blue..... tell someone that you are full of weariness.... and they will IMMEDIATELY try to spin it into something positive.....

Or they will just change the subject.....

Thankfully.... while GOD does comfort the depressed.....

Scripture is also gut level honest about the emptiness we feel when we just don't **GET life....**

I urge you to resist that urge to squelch any negative talk.....

Instead **empathize** with people who are hurting.....Listen to them.... like you are listening to Solomon right now....

It might be the very circumstance God has brought them into so that they can actually get a TASTE of how EMPTY **life without God** really is....

### **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10**

"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is **new**"? It has been already in the ages before us."

Modern man lives by the premise that we (as a race) are making progress. I can remember well as a child, watching the first man land on the moon....and hearing Neil Armstrong make the pronouncement: "One small step for man... one giant leap for mankind!"

We were full of hope and expectations for what all this scientific advancement could mean for our generation....

We did seem to get TANG out of the deal.....

But think about it though..... 42 years later..... have all the **NEW** things made any difference in the essence of our plight as people?

Is TECHNOLOGY and EDUCATION really helping us make **more sense** out of life under the sun?

**No**.... because our most de-habilitating problem in life has not been solved by anything NEW.... that man has accomplished....

Nothing NEW has been able to extend the memory of our brief human lives ....beyond one generation.....

**Ecclesiastes 1:11**

"There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after."

Somebody tell me what the INDIVIDUAL goal of EVERY professional athlete is?

It is to make it to... the **HALL of FAME**.....

To have their sports career memorialized as something that will **LAST**.....from one generation to another....

Yet, there is nothing new under the sun.....

A couple of generations go by.... and the household names of today.... will be forgotten entirely....

Our lives are truly like a flash in the pan..... some flashes are brighter than others....some just a mild spark....

That is why the Wisdom writer of the NT.... James says repeats these same truths to us:

**James 4:14**

"yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."

Life under the sun.... is altogether empty... it **MAKES NO SENSE**.... apart from the full reality of the rest of the story....

Please bow your heads.....

Perhaps like God found Hagar wandering out in the wilderness.....trying to figure out what she was going to do next.....

His Word has arrested some of you .....

Like Solomon.... you have been exploring life out in the wilderness under the sun... without God for some time....

And He wants you to know you don't have to STAY empty.....you don't have to STAY alone.... you don't have to stay BEWILDERED....

He is pouring out **GRACE** even now to repent.... and to return to the cross of Jesus....

To make HIM the central reality of your existence once again.....

To trust Him (even though you don't understand what is going on around you)...

To cling to Him as your only hope...

Confess to Him that you have been away.....disobedient.... living life your own way without Him....

Let's sing this song of confession together.....

This makes NO SENSE whatsoever.....

That is.... apart from G O D.

That is the message of the book we are beginning today.....

**Mark 8:36**

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"

**John 12:25**

"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever **hates his life in this world** will keep it for eternal life."