



## **AN UNHAPPY BUSINESS**

***THE FRUSTRATING, SORROWFUL NATURE OF LIFE UNDER HEAVEN***



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***LESSON FROM THE PREACHER: OUR WORLD IS BROKEN AND NO ONE "UNDER HEAVEN" CAN FIX IT***

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## OUTLINE ... (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 ESV)

### 1. THE PREACHER POURS HIMSELF FULLY INTO STUDYING AND EXPLORING BY WISDOM EVERYTHING THAT IS DONE UNDER HEAVEN.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:12-13a ESV) I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. **13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.**

**Transition:** So the Preacher begins a sincere, passionate, wise pursuit and study of all human activity on earth and was confronted with the stark reality that life under heaven—*life without God*—was a life of heaviness and futility and sadness ... that all life apart from God was merely “busy work.”

### 2. THE PREACHER DISCOVERS THAT LIFE UNDER HEAVEN IS MERELY “BUSY WORK.”

- (Ecclesiastes 1:13b ESV) It is **an unhappy business** that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.
- A. God has given humans the unhappy business of “busy work.”
- (Ecclesiastes 1:13b NASB 2020) **It is a sorry task** with which God has given the sons of mankind to be troubled.
- B. This “busy work” is a heavy burden on mankind.
- (Ecclesiastes 1:13b NIV) I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. **What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!**
- C. This “busy work” is a tragic existence.
- (Ecclesiastes 1:13 NLT) I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. **I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race.**

### **EXCURSUS: ANSWERING THE QUESTION ... WHY DOES THE PREACHER CREDIT GOD WITH GIVING THIS UNHAPPY BUSINESS?**

*It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.*

*(Ecclesiastes 1:13b ESV)*

#### I. We (God's human creation) were created in the image of God to fully receive God's blessing which was life with God himself.

This means that we are hard-wired with a deep, inner desire for significance and truth and meaning in our lives.

- (Genesis 1:27 NLT) **So God created human beings in his own image.** In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

#### II. But we (God's human creation through Adam's disobedience) rejected life with God and are now unable to receive God's blessing other than his blessing of creation—what is “under the sun.”

We—the human race—have lost our original identity and now live as fallen beings in a cursed world. Those who live in a cursed world may still enjoy the blessings of life under the sun but this is life without God ... which is where and how most people live—**enjoying the blessings** of God's creation **apart from the Blesser** (*the Creator*) as they are now separated from God.

- (Genesis 3:8-10 ESV) And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, **and I was afraid, because I was naked,** and I hid myself.”

III. Those who live only "under heaven"—*life without God*—cannot understand the extent of the problem, let alone offer valid solutions.

As the expression goes, "We not only do not have the answers but we don't even know the right questions to ask."

- (Ecclesiastes 1:15b ESV) **And what is lacking cannot be counted.**

IV. God uses the "unhappy business" and the "heavy burden" of the futility of life to cause us to stumble and falter before the problem ... to give up on life under the sun ... life without God.

**God uses Ecclesiastes to paint a dark, empty, background upon which to present the brilliant light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**



**THE KEY** to the lessons in Ecclesiastes is to never remove ourselves from the *context* of the Preacher's study which is life "under heaven" ... "under the sun."

**Context:** The surroundings, circumstances, environment, background or settings → *that determine, specify, or clarify the meaning of an event or other occurrence.*

The Preacher set a parameter for his study. His search would be restricted to only the wisdom and knowledge found within the context of life "under heaven" or "under the sun." *This is in stark contrast to the approach of the psalmist in the following text.*

- (Psalm 73:16–17 ESV) But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, 17 **until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.**

V. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE FACT** that God is responsible for this "unhappy business" because God is God, and he reigns sovereignly and providentially over all the "business" of earth.

- (Proverbs 16:33 ESV) **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.**
- (Lamentations 3:37–39 ESV) Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? 38 **Is it not from the**

**mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?** 39 Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?

- (Isaiah 45:7 ESV) I form light and create darkness; **I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.**
- (Isaiah 14:24 ESV) The LORD of hosts has sworn: "**As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.**"
- (Ephesians 1:11 ESV) In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.**
- (Daniel 5:21 ESV) He was driven from among the children of mankind ... **until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind** and sets over it whom he will.
- (Daniel 4:35 ESV) All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, **and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"**
- (Romans 8:19–21 ESV) For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope** 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

**–END EXCURSUS–**

3. **THE PREACHER'S STUDY REVEALS THAT ALL THE "BUSINESS" OF LIFE UNDER THE SUN IS MEANINGLESS.**

- (Ecclesiastes 1:14 ESV) I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and **behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.**
- (Ecclesiastes 1:14 NIV) I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; **all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**

Every endeavor under the sun is meaningless "busy work"—like chasing after the wind.

**Review:** Vanity ... hebel ... means breath and is used metaphorically of anything transitory, frail, unsatisfying.

#### 4. THE PREACHER DRAWS HIS CONCLUSIONS ABOUT LIFE "UNDER HEAVEN."

A. **He concluded** that what is crooked cannot be made straight—this world is beyond fixing.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:15a ESV) **What is crooked cannot be made straight.**

In spite of a sense of glory, we all fall short of glory. This crooked world can never be made right. No amount of human effort or genius can fix the brokenness or bring us to glory.

- (Romans 1:22–23 ESV) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God** for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
- (Romans 3:23 ESV) For all have sinned **and fall short of the glory of God.**

B. **He concluded** that the problems of this world are beyond the scope of human comprehension.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:15b ESV) And what is lacking cannot be counted.

Paradise under heaven, under the sun, is lost and gone forever. We not only cannot overcome the deficiencies of this world but we cannot even conceive the magnitude of what has been lost.

C. **He was confident** in his quest to increase in and gain experience in much wisdom and knowledge.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:16 ESV) I said in my heart, "**I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.**"

D. **He concluded** that even with great, surpassing wisdom that understanding life under the sun was meaningless.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:17 ESV) And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

Leaving no stone unturned he extended his search even to know madness and folly but with the same result—this also was but striving after wind.

#### 5. THE PREACHER'S FINAL CONCLUSION REVEALS THE FRUSTRATION AND SORROW OF MUCH WISDOM AND INCREASED KNOWLEDGE "UNDER HEAVEN."

- (Ecclesiastes 1:18 ESV) For in **much wisdom** is **much vexation**, and he who **increases knowledge** **increases sorrow.**

A. **There is no victory** in the wisdom and knowledge found "under heaven" over the grief and sorrows of this evil world.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:18 NLT) The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.
- (Ecclesiastes 1:18 NIV) For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

B. **Ultimate victory** over the vexation and sorrow of this world comes only when we by faith look past the horizon of earth to Jesus Son of God.

- (1 John 5:4–5 NLT) For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. 5 **And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.**

C. **Daily victory** over the vexation and sorrow of this world comes only when we set our minds on and live in view of the things above and **not** the things of earth.

- (Colossians 3:2 ESV) **Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.**
- (Psalm 103:19 ESV) The LORD has established his throne **in the heavens**, and his kingdom rules over all.
- (2 Corinthians 5:1 ESV) For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, **we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**