

A look at the misunderstood book of Ecclesiastes

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When Solomon is described as the Preacher, it is not exactly a preacher as we think of it today. The idea is more of "assemblyman" or "one who addresses an assembly." Teacher is also a good translation in this regard.

Solomon is one who had great opportunity to try all the various roads to happiness. He was known also as a man of great wisdom. We yet can learn much from both his successes and his failures.

2. What did the author mean when he used the term "vanity" (v. 2)?

We are hit by the writer's dark mood right at the outset. His opening musings project a sense of hopelessness or at least resignation. By using the expression vanity of vanities, he underlines just how

hopeless he thinks it all is. It is as if he has said "utter emptiness." He has tried everything. Instead of bringing happiness, his attempts have brought the opposite. Remember: the Preacher (Solomon) has had more money, lovers, wisdom, and fame than we can imagine (1 Kings 3:1-15; 4:20-34; 11:1-3, etc.). But he declares all is vanity.

3. What did the author mean when he used the phrase "under the sun" (vs. 3,4)?

Solomon now explained what he meant about the vanity of life by applying the truth to man's work. A person has to work hard all his life; but what, in earthly terms, does he really have to show for it at the end of the day?

The phrase "under the sun" is used twenty-nine times in the book of Ecclesiastes.

These words have an important defining purpose to Solomon. They describe the world taken by itself, without any other reality being considered. It is important to note, however, that Solomon himself was not writing from an under-the-sun perspective; rather, he was examining how we should live our lives, and this included an honest assessment of life's frustrations and lack of fulfillment apart from God.

The reason man's labors are empty apart from God is that everyone dies. Seen as a closed system, the world goes on endlessly in ever repeating cycles of futility. Because the bodies of believers are still unredeemed and because we still live in the world, Christians are still subject to the frustrations and seeming pointlessness of much that we have to do. Solomon would

later urge people to give thanks for earthly blessings (cf. 5:18) because they are God's gifts and they point to Him, but the things of earth will never prove ultimately satisfying.

One generation dies, and then another comes along to take its place. But nothing really changes, even as our lives pass as "a vapour" (James, 4:14).

4. How often do you think about your own mortality? Do you think about it too much or too little? What value is there in thinking about this subject?

Ecclesiastes is a favorite book of many poets and philosophers. Accepting its

unflinching analysis of how brief and fleeting life "under the sun" really is, many are determined not to put off important decisions about personal direction in life. An astute observer once noted that America, for its part, had changed from a death defying to a death denying culture.

This means that many simply avoid thinking about the unpleasant issue of their own mortality. But it is our mortality that should give us a sense of urgency.

When we're in the midst of a stressful situation, the fact of our mortality can also help us ask "Years from now, how much of this will matter?" Perhaps this question can

give you new perspective and urgency regarding your work in the kingdom of God.

5. What about the sun's behavior illustrates Solomon's point (vs. 5,6)?

Solomon proceeded to cite phenomena from nature that demonstrate the cyclical nature of life. These patterns of nature have influenced many of man's religions and philosophies.

We hear many references to the "circle of life" and like phrases, with the suggestion that submitting to this cycle is the sum total of existence. If we do not take God into account, there is much truth to this. Only God provides

Graham statue to be unveiled

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE—At age 87, the Rev. Billy Graham can no longer stride to the pulpit and uses a walker to get around.

But a bronze statue to be unveiled by the Southern Baptist Convention will recall the evangelist in his prime. Created by a pastor and sculptor in Wyoming, the figure of Graham will stand larger than life with a Bible in one hand and arms outstretched before a giant cross.

It's a tribute to the man who ministered privately to American presidents and preached the Gospel to millions in packed stadiums.

The statue will be presented in June at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting in Greensboro and then will be moved to Nashville for a permanent installation later this year.

Terrell O'Brien, the sculptor and a Baptist pastor in Pavilion, Wyo., said his research for the artwork turned up a number of portraits and busts of Graham, but nothing like his statue.

O'Brien, 58, wanted to recognize

Graham's evangelism all over the world, so he created the outstretched gesture, which he calls an invitation for people to accept Christ.

"I have to try to tell a story and pay tribute as well," O'Brien said. "This was not easy, in particular because

I'm dealing with a world-known figure. It caused me to tremble. But it's been a tremendous blessing."

Graham didn't sit for the statue, so O'Brien used photographs to sculpt and mold the piece.

David Bruce, executive assistant to Graham, said the evangelist, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, appreciates the tribute.

"Mr. Graham is humbled by those kinds of things and it's nothing he seeks out," Bruce said. "He's tried to deflect those kinds of earthly honors. He's not searching for any."

O'Brien said he was approached in 2004 to create

the piece by Southern Baptist Convention president Bobby Welch, who had seen some of the artist's work.

A professional sculptor for 24 years, O'Brien has done work for Cabelas, a chain of hunting outfitters stores, as well as universities, hospitals and cemeteries.

Graham, who recently accepted the 2006 George Bush Award for Excellence in Public Service, has preached to 210 million people worldwide over more than six decades.

Four years ago, he had a series of brain surgeries—the remnants of which still cause him pain—and he's refrained from making many public appearances. He has Parkinson's disease and has been treated for prostate cancer.

Last month, Graham preached to an arena crowd of Hurricane Katrina victims in New Orleans for his first evangelistic sermon since June, when he led his final revival meeting in New York

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Graham

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After we stayed back down on the property about an hour, we decided to leave. We had to walk about 1500 feet to go down on the property. And that was a long walk for my friend but a short walk for me. On our way back out, and some distance from Charlie Rodwell's house, my friend thought he saw a police car in the driveway. As we grew nearer, I recognized two law enforcement cars. One was from the sheriff's department. I told my friend, as I told him prior to our going in: "We'll have no conversation with any of them if we see them. We'll have no conversation with the law enforcement officer. I'll say just as little as possible." As we drew near the deputy's car, he got out of his vehicle and greeted me politely and said: "That woman made a complaint but you cannot be landlocked." I responded politely to the deputy: "I own property back there and the sheriff already knows about this." He proceeded to say: "She said Banzet said..." Before waiting to hear what Banzet (their lawyer) said, I told my friend: "Let's go!" We had to walk about 400 feet from the officer there in the driveway back to the car. As we left, the cussing woman, Charlie Rodwell's wife, was still mouthing off at the officer. I told my friend: "She had no respect for you at all. She didn't even know you. If a woman will not respect her husband, she will not respect other men." See how easy it is to tell if a woman is not saved? Here was a great church woman spitting out all that hatred against me. As we journeyed back, I wondered about why we never saw Charlie Rodwell. After returning home, I called a friend over there and told him what happened, but that we never saw Charlie Rodwell. He replied: "Charlie died about four months ago." Charlie Rodwell went to his grave hating me. I was asked the question by a law enforcement officer way back years ago: "Why is he fighting you?" At first, I hadn't figured out the material reason. Then I was told that Charlie was mad because his dad sold me that property. Charlie's dad and I were very close friends. Just before Charlie died, his brother called me to tell me that he had tried to convince Charlie that he was wrong for blocking the road. And others over the past nearly five or more years had tried to convince him he was wrong, but to no avail. Charlie was determined to have his way. So my Heavenly Father gave him up to his way, reprobating him. Right before my eyes, he was reprobated. And his wife is going the same way he went, down to a Devil's hell. My friend, don't you go that way. We brought nothing into this world, and we are not going to carry anything out. But play the fool as this man did, and his wife is doing now, and you too will lift up your eyes in hell. There is a doctor and a woman over there in the doctor's office that are being reprobated. God's Reprobation is just as real as His Election is real.

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