
Day 148 – May 28

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)
Solomon’s Reflections on Life

Readings: *Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 6:10-12; 3:18-22; 2:12-16; 9:1-12; 8:16-17*

Reflections:

- Ecclesiastes is at first glance pretty depressing. A big part of it is simple cataloging everything that really doesn’t matter in life. What we discover is that almost everything people put their time and effort into simply doesn’t matter in the end. This is very important at this part of the story though. Remember that Solomon and the building of the temple is the pinnacle of the story of Israel. Here you have the wisest, most glorious king at the height of Israel’s glory. All of God’s promises have been fulfilled. They are secure in their land. They have an incredible temple, the wisest king on earth, and the one true God. What could go wrong? Right? In this moment, we discover that it is all going wrong and fast. None of what they thought really mattered. None of what they thought would save them will ultimately save them. The story of “what doesn’t work” was now going to reveal its surprising and saddening plot twist. Inserting at this point in the story Solomon’s insights into what doesn’t really matter, is his version of “let me tell you what doesn’t work.” If you look at what he is saying compared to all the promises offered to Israel, it is fascinating to examine the contrast. Solomon, here at the very height of success, stops and acknowledges that none of it matters. Like Moses declaring at the end of the Law that Israel in the end will blow it entirely and not keep the Law, so Solomon declares that all the wisdom, wealth and success that came with the Promised Land, a great king and the temple, means nothing. Wow! This confession sets the stage for the plummet into tragic failure that will ultimately set the stage for God to reveal “what does work.”
- In the sections listed above a recurrent theme is that death ultimately wipes out meaning. The uncertainty of what happens after death left Israel in a very vulnerable position. Again, this clear and unmistakable identification that “death undermines true meaning to life” sets the stage for the resurrection of Jesus and his clear triumph over death. Jesus turns the world of Solomon on its head and the first thing that Jesus’ deals with is death. It is here in the resurrection of Jesus that we will see that hope, meaning and true joy can be restored to humanity for this life and the life to come. Consider the completely different perspective that Paul has because of the resurrection of Jesus: “I

declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that *your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*" (1 Corinthians 15:50-56)

- What a contrast to everything Solomon writes and understands. For Solomon, the way of Israel leads to complete meaninglessness. For Paul, the way of Christ leads to ultimate purpose and confidence. Again we have to say, "Thank God for Jesus!"