
Day 151 - May 31

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Solomon's Reflections on Life

End of Solomon's Reign

Readings: *Ecclesiastes 3:1-17; 11:7-12:8; 12:13-14; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31; 1 Kings 11:41-43*

Reflections:

- The end of Solomon's wisdom and his life seems quite sad for being a symbol of the height of Israel as a nation. His concluding wisdom is depressing. In summary, there is a time for everything both good and bad. Enjoy the good while you have it because in the end you are going to die. His life ends without fanfare and his enduring memory for Israel is that the wisest man on earth, their great king, ended up as probably the greatest idolater of all kings. A sobering example of what doesn't work.
- Solomon's conclusion of Ecclesiastes is that people within Israel should simply fear God (trust, honor him) and keep his commandments because he will judge you. In this little sequence of thought we see a clear depiction of how religion works. Honoring fear, rules, punishment. Religion focuses on a type of worship of God that is rooted in a humble honor that is grounded upon a fundamental fear of God. The way a person expresses their humble honor is by a strict keeping of the rules or laws of God. The ongoing motivation is ultimately the fear of punishment for breaking the rules and thus coming under harsh judgment. A huge amount of preaching historically and even today is rooted in this basic understanding of how God changes the human heart. Punishment reinforces the strict keeping of rules. Keeping the rules equals honoring/fearing God. This is religion. At the end of Solomon's life that is truly all he can offer. And how does his life back up this effectiveness of this approach to serving God? He was bound by idolatry and sin. Let's all say it together: "Religion doesn't work to change the human heart."
- Jesus introduces a completely different sequence: Loving God and being loved by God is the ultimate goal. Faith in God does not tip towards fear primarily but towards love. How do we live in this kind of worshipful love? We are filled with God's presence through his Spirit. What is this relationship with the Spirit based on? Is it based on fear of punishment or judgment? No, the exact opposite. It is rooted in radical grace, mercy

and forgiveness. We are motivated into intimacy with God as we discover his limitless love, acceptance and desire for us to be completely reconciled as Father and child.

- So what is the conclusion we can take away from Solomon? What doesn't work is trying to punish yourself and others so that you or the other people will obey the right rules and in turn will be right with God and you. What does work is to embrace radical mercy and grace so that people can experience the love and power of the Spirit and in turn will be overflowing with love for God, others and self. Praise God for Jesus!