

Intro: Every good story has a plot line. There is a natural progression and movement in a story, even if that progression takes a variety of forms. It doesn't matter if you are watching Handy Manny, shout out to our kids this morning, or if you're reading Shakespeare, a story has an *introduction* that introduces us to the setting, characters, and opening action, *rising action* with conflicts, and anti-climax points, then you have the *climax*, the *falling action*, and finally resolution. These movements and the ability to grab the reader and pull them into those movements is what makes story a story.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is really a story. The literary form does not, on first glance, appear to be a story as it is filled with poetry and proverbs, and didactic material, but from chapter 1 to chapter 12 a beautifully complex and yet incredibly simple story unfolds. It is a story designed to teach us a lesson about our lives and the world God has made. To understand Ecclesiastes you really have to begin with the end, so if you are here for the first time, or are relatively new to RHC, you're going to walk away with a true grasp of the message of the whole book. I like what author Jim Harrison says, "**The answer is always in the entire story, not just a piece of it**" & this certainly holds true with Ecclesiastes. This morning you are going to hear what amounts to the point of it all for the Book of Ecclesiastes, but not just Ecclesiastes. I want to suggest that the point of this story is the point of every story pose to you

"The Point of It All"
Ecclesiastes 12:8-14
May 20, 2012

The Point: Find freedom from vanity by fearing God and keeping his commands.

Trans: So what does the Preacher want to teach us about Navigating our journey through life with a God-centered compass? First, he simply says...

I. See the vanity of this world (12:8).

- In verse 8 we have the thesis of the book restated. The verse provides the *inclusio* to the book that we first encountered in 1:2.
- We walked in the front door of the book to hear, "Vanity of vanities" & now that we are walking out the back door, we are hearing the same declaration: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."
- Where have we been? Look at these **vain pursuits**...
 - Wisdom. (having all the answers)
 - Pleasure
 - Wine
 - Sex (without limit)
 - Accomplishments
 - Leisure & Entertainment
 - Possessions (property, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, treasure)
 - Work (finding your identity in your job, becoming a workaholic, won't deliver. After all people are often driving by greed and envy in their work anyway)
 - Power & Reputation
 - Wealth & Riches
 - Family & Long life
- He said seeking ultimate satisfaction and purpose and meaning is an exercise in futility. It's as impossible as grabbing the wind.
- When you evaluate this list, can you say, "I am not seeking my ultimate satisfaction in any of these pursuits"? *or* Have some of them become an idol in your life that is either keeping you from God or hindering your relationship with God?
- Listen, there is not one thing on this list that is inherently evil. Idolatry is taking a good thing and making a god out of it, taking a good thing that God has created and making it an ultimate thing that ultimately replaces God.
- We have an uncanny ability to worship false, cheap, unsatisfying gods (lower case "g"). Any of these good pursuits can quickly become ultimate to the point where they dominate our thoughts, they alter our values, and they push God out of the equation at worst, or marginalize him at best.

Trans: That has been the message of Ecclesiastes, and it is a message we desperately need to hear.

II. Heed the words of the wise (12:9-12).

- Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom found in the wisdom literature of the OT. We are exhorted in the Bible to prize wisdom, seek it, find it, and treasure it. What we have here in vv. 9-12 is a call to heed the words of this wise teacher, we've known throughout this series as "the Preacher."
- **Verse 9** says tells us that he is he is wise. "besides being wise..."
- Teacher of knowledge, weighed, studied. He made it his practice to listen carefully and reflect on what he heard. This is what it takes to be wise.
- Some of us struggle to listen. Others listen, but we don't reflect. Still others, listen and reflect but fail to put what we learn into practice. Not the preacher... He...
- "arranged many proverbs with great care."
- Look at his method. **Verse 10:** He sought to find words of delight, and uprightly wrote words of truth. In other words, he was concerned with both the form of delivery (which is important; most of you are awake right now – I know we're just getting rolling but how we communicate is important...) but more importantly, he had the content right. He "uprightly wrote words of truth."
- Great communication, and for our context, great teaching, great preaching, which is your job too by the way, maybe just not on Sunday mornings... first and foremost has great content, truth, but it also needs to be packaged well.

Now, what do words of wisdom accomplish? This is good.

- They are like goads. They are designed to prod us along, spur us on.
 - **Pic:** Preakness Stakes was yesterday, the follow up to the greatest 2 minutes in spors, the Kentucky Derby. Mario Gutierrez took his whip and I'll Have Another went to work and chased down Bodemiester for the \$600,000 payched on the second leg of the Triple Crown.
- They are like nails. This seems to carry the idea of keeping one firmly in place.
- Given by one Shepherd: All wisdom ultimately has one source, God. God is described as Shepherd. He leads us, provides, protects us, and prods us along to paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- **Verse 12. "My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is weariness of the flesh."**
- We have a warning to heed these wise words of God and beware of that which goes beyond his word.
- Books: Do you like to read? You got your nook, your iPad, your laptop, your library card, your bookshelves. I love books. Read books. Read good ones. . . . Read your Bible.. The book of books...
- **Excursus: The Word of God... life-giving wisdom**
- The Word is enough. The Scriptures are sufficient. You can study a lot of books, and we do, but do we thirst for God's truth? It's available to us! Incredibly available to us!
- Jesus said this in Mt. 4:4 quoting the OT book of Deuteronomy: "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**"
- Do you hunger for the Word like you're hungering for that sandwich or salad for lunch? Jesus, quoting the Word, says we must live by this, and not just a few words, every word.
- How well do you know the Word of God? Are you increasing in your knowledge of the Word? Are you setting aside time to get in, read, dig, meditate, memorize the Word? God's truth is life to us. His Spirit uses the Word in our lives to bring transformation.

Trans: See the vanity of this world. Heed the words of the wise. Now **verse 13.**

- The end of the matter; all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter. The final word. The word that sums up all of the words of this book, and I would be so bold to say not only of this book but all other books!

III. Fear God and Keep His Commands (12:13-14).

"Fear God & Keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Fear God.

- We've seen the instruction to fear God six other times, not including statements like the one we saw last week to "remember our Creator in the days of our youth" which really carries the same concept
- Define it. Attitude of reverential awe before God.
- Listen to what John Murray, who was a theology Professor at Princeton Seminary during the last century, says about the fear of God: *"The fear of God in which godliness consists is the fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honour, and worship, and all of these on the highest level of exercise. It is the reflex in our consciousness of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God."*
- Breakdown.....
- To know God and see God truly is to fear him, and this fear is healthy and freeing. Some of you are thinking, "I'm supposed to be afraid of God, as in frightened, as in terrified" This kind of fear is not like that of a slave who is terrified of his harsh and unjust master. This is the fear of a son who desperately wants to please their father
- What is your attitude before God? What is your posture? Do you love him? Or Have you rejected him? As you are going throughout your week, is God at the forefront of your thoughts? Are your actions, thoughts, and priorities filtered through your knowledge of him?
- **Pic:** Richie Farmer... So much of the time we give God more than a little head nod...
- The fear of God keeps him in his proper place and puts us and all of our desires in their proper place.
- How do we acquire this? Focus on the character of God. Get to know God. Acquire greater thoughts of God. He is far more holy and far more glorious and far more loving and far more merciful and far more just than we could ever imagine. Job 26:14...
- Performance based religion will lead to servile fear.
- App: Fear of God vs. Fear of Man
- "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)
- Oftentimes, we fear spiders, snakes, and bumblebees more than we fear God. Man, God has the authority to crush us in a moments notice.
- Though the idea is most prominent as a refrain through the OT, it is not only exemplified in Christ (see Isaiah 11) and assumed throughout, but it is also explicitly encouraged.
- After speaking of the promise of God dwelling in and among us as our Father, the Apostle Paul says in 2 Cor. 7:1: **"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)**
- The gospel teaches us to fear...

Keep his commandments.

- The order is important here: fear God *and* keep his commandments. The one should naturally flow from the other. This is why John Murray said: "The fear of God is the soul of godliness." (*Principles of Conduct*) Get that. Take that with you. Don't forget it. Memorize it like it's a Bible verse... "The fear of God is the soul of godliness."
- When we see him, love him, adore him, trust him, trust in his wisdom and will for our lives, then we are going to want to keep his commands.
- If we understood how seriously God takes sin, and how much he delights in obedience and the joy that is found there, we would live so differently. We would be so careful to keep his commands.
- Listen, the commands of God, we could say the law, are a reflection of his character. Therefore, to not keep his commands is to question his character.
- Genesis 1-3: God is God, so he gets to call the shots. We get incredibly frustrated with that, because we think we know better... so we do what we want. We question the wisdom of God, challenge the wisdom of God, rebel against the wisdom of God and then usurp the throne.
- Father nature of God. He loves us. He cares. He's good. He's wise. (1 John 5:3). You have to hear this...
- We are averse to God's commands not because they are not good, but because we are not good.
- And the consequences are severe even if they do not seem immediate, you hear me?
- Failing to keep his commandments will necessarily effect our fellowship with God. & this is not just avoiding certain sins, but failing to actively practice those things that he has told us we should be

about. There are plenty of commands that tell us what to stay away from, what to say, “no thank you” to, but there are also plenty of commands to actively keep.

- Why don't we keep his commands? Because we presume upon grace... God understands. He'll forgive me again... but here's the greater answer. We underestimate the holiness of God. We play games and trifle with his holiness....
- ***The gospel motivates our obedience...***

This is the whole duty of man.

- Hebrew scholar Peter Enns says “the narrator could not put the matter more strongly.”
- This is how “we fulfill our humanity.” This is why we were created in the first place. This is what Jesus is doing for everyone who embraces him as the King of their lives. He's renewing the image of God in us, making us truly human. (maybe modify...) Irenaeus said: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” That person, not dabbling in all of the ways contrary to God, but reflecting the character and works of God with how we live our lives. That's why we're here.
- So don't miss the logic here: It is only recognizing God as God in our lives and submitting to his will that we will ever be truly alive. This is the place where joy and meaning and satisfaction is found, in the Creator himself, not in his creation. This is where we find reason to live in an unreasonable world.
- Practical:
- This is the point of it all...
- This is our job. This is our purpose. This is our reason for being. Our goal. Our objective. This should be our one singular passion. Ecclesiastes is basically saying, “Get this, and you get the rest.”
- “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” – Westminster Shorter Catechism

Why? Well, ***Judgment***

- **Verse 14.** “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
- God will summon each of our deeds. We will give an account for every moment of our lives.
- EVERYTHING... Every good deed. Every bad deed. Every good thought. Every evil thought. Every good motive. Every evil motive. You get the picture? Every good word. Every evil word.
- He covers it all by saying, “Hey, that junk in your life that no one else, even the people who are the closest of the close in your life, yeah, that stuff that they don't even know about. That secret stuff... it won't be a secret then, and oh, by the way, it's not a secret to God now.” It will be brought to light then. Good, evil. All of it.... Nothing escapes his notice.
- You say, “Well, how does that work? If I'm a Christian I won't be judged for my sin, because God's grace covers me in Christ.” You will not be condemned for your sin. You are forgiven of all your sin: past, present and future, but we will still be judged for EVERYTHING. So many people presume upon God's grace or resist grace because they think that how we live doesn't matter after we receive salvation, but that could not be further from the truth.
- Two judgments:
- ***The gospel prepares us for judgment...*** Some of you are starting this reality in the face and you know it's not good. The just judgment of God is coming for you. Repent & receive Christ. He died to deal with your sins and prepare

Conclusion:

Some of you are wrestling with what this life, and more specifically your life, is all about...

Ecclesiastes has strongly argued that this life under the sun has nothing to ultimately offer us. Apart from God, life is devoid of meaning, purpose & satisfaction, but in the fear of God, there is life. It's in our knowledge of God that we find life.

This is why Jesus came and just hammered this truth again and again and again: “I am the bread of life. I will give you water and you will never thirst again. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the treasure you've always longed for (mt. 13:44).” It is only through Jesus that our freedom from vanity is sealed.

What about you? Have you connected your story to this story? Have you connected the story of your life to the story of Christ? Oh, by the way, it's already connected, it's just a matter of what you're going to do with. Let me encourage you this morning: “The answer is always in the entire story, not just a piece of it” Resolution. GOSPEL! Response...