

HELPFUL THOUGHTS

What does meaningless mean? The word is all over the book of Ecclesiastes – what does it mean? Does it mean that everything is pointless and therefore nothing we do matters? No! Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 sheds some light. The things that go on under the sun, the things which Ecclesiastes calls ‘meaningless’ are incomprehensible to us. We may search for the meaning, but we won’t find it. This does not mean that there is not meaning at all, though. How arrogant of us to think if we can’t figure out the meaning there must not be one. We must remember that there is a God and he is much higher than us, much wiser, much more knowing (because he is perfect at all those things). God knows the meaning because everything under the sun has happened under his control and will ultimately serve his perfect plan even if it is evil. God is so powerful and so amazing that he can take evil upon evil, which we all struggle to even comprehend, and he can use to in his perfect, sinless plan for the world *without sinning himself*. So surely we can trust that he knows the meaning where we know only meaninglessness.

ABOUT THE COVER IMAGE

“Memento Mori” by Anonymous (wordsfail.com), a sojourner

Inspired by Ecclesiastes 9:2-3, 7-9

Like a broken record, the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastics repeats the phrase “under the sun” over and over as he contemplates the human condition. His earthly perspective and questions and experiential basis for answering predates and anticipates the Greek philosophical tradition by almost 500 years. Here is a man seeking to understand life below a heavenly perspective and seek what is the best way we should live...and the answer is in recognition that we will die.

Rich, poor, wise, foolish, sinner and saint, we will all die.

Just as in Plato’s dialogues, where Socrates stated that philosophy is about preparing to die, learning how to live in light of our own mortality, the Preacher calls us to consider how we should live.

However in the midst of this grim perspective, in the context of God’s wisdom we see what our great blessing is during all the days of our lives. Ecc 9:7-9 stands out to me, “Eat..with happiness, drink...with a cheerful heart. God has already approved your works...Enjoy life with the woman you love all the days of your fleeting life...”

Mortality has been the aim of the art of Memento Mori in art history (Latin for “Remember you will die”), to encourage people in light of their mortality. And as I reflected on the theme in Ecclesiastics I was stirred to also remember that we are not able to save ourselves through our own morality, that God remembered us, and sent Jesus to live the life of righteousness we couldn’t, and conquer death after conquering sin.

And so the piece departs from the traditional imagery of mortality, fading flowers and time flying and ends with contemplating Christ’s own death, His burial and His triumph over death.

DAILY READING PLAN AND DEVOTIONAL



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FROM CREATION TO THE CROSS

September 7-13, 2009

SCRIPTURAL PRAYER

Lord God, just as Solomon admonished his son to pay attention to the sayings of the wise, may I also pay close attention to your word as my truest source of wisdom. Your ways are wise and pleasing when I keep them in my heart. Remind me of that daily. Amen. from Proverbs 22:17-18

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING AND MEDITATION

Monday Ecclesiastes 4-6; Psalm 47; Proverbs 22:16 Ecclesiastes 4:1-3
Who could read these verses and not wholeheartedly agree? Our world is so broken. But what a comfort that in God’s word he speaks so clearly about that brokenness. God truly identifies with our suffering. And it’s into that suffering that God sent Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Savior – praise Him today!

Tuesday Ecclesiastes 7-9; Psalm 48; Proverbs 22:17-19 Ecclesiastes 7:16-18
One of the most important aspects of a healthy spiritual life is an accurate view of ourselves. Our legalistic self-righteousness (thinking we can act ‘good’ enough to save ourselves) can destroy us while continuing to sin wickedly under the banner of grace (Romans 6:1-2) will also lead us to destruction. We should have a good grasp that we cannot truly be righteous and at the same time we should desire to no longer act wickedly. This would lead us to the kind of godly sorrow Paul wrote about in II Corinthians 7– the kind that brings repentance, which leads to salvation and leaves no regret. Friends, today, cry out to God and acknowledge that you have no means to be righteous and that you desire to be united with Jesus – clothe yourselves in His righteousness and continually imitate His character.

Wednesday Ecclesiastes 10-12; Psalm 49; Proverbs 22:20-21 Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
After an extended discourse on the confounding contradictions and heartbreaking suffering and confusion in life, Ecclesiastes closes with this: ‘Here is the conclusion in the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.’ How often do we forget our duty and try to explain everything we experience, often in ways that lead us to accuse God of heartlessness or deny that God is in control (because we thing no loving God who was all-powerful would allow suffering at all)? Our duty is to obey God out of respectful awe for him – and this carries with it an expectation that we *trust* God as well. When you face suffering or see the suffering of others, you must remain committed to trust that God is both good and in control, however mysterious and even frustrating that may be for you. Today, remember that you are not God, but if you obey his commandments (which Jesus summed up as Love God and love your neighbor), you can be his instrument.

Thursday Song of Songs 1-4; Psalm 50; Proverbs 22:22-23 Song of Songs 2:4
In light of Paul’s teaching that marriage reflects Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33), the Song of Songs can take on a beautiful dual meaning. First, this verse has a clear picture of a husband cherishing his wife (must like Christ cherishes His church), celebrating her under a banner of love, and the beloved’s expressed delight reflects the joyful response of a

godly wife to her husband’s sacrificial leadership. That alone is a beautiful picture – but you can add to it the layer that when Jesus returns to redeem all things, He will take all His brothers and sisters into God’s heavenly banquet hall under the banner of His love, which was last seen at the Cross. Praise God for the complexities and beauties of his Word!

Friday Song of Songs 5-8; Psalm 51; Proverbs 22:24-25 Psalm 51:10-12
In reading the Song of Songs, which speaks directly to the man/woman relationship and the joy of marriage and intimacy, Psalm 51 has a great word to add – God is a God of forgiveness. We all sin – maybe you have brokenness in your purity, having enjoyed pleasures that God intended for marriage outside of a marriage relationship; maybe you have sinned against your husband or wife with hurtful words or actions (or silence and inaction); maybe you’re a single man who has pursued a woman foolishly and carelessly, hurting her heart; maybe you’re a single lady who struggles with doubts as you desire God to bless you with a mate – whatever your circumstance, there is abundant grace and renewal found with the Holy Father. Let Psalm 51:10-12 be your prayer today, that God may restore joy in marriage, in singleness, in life.

Saturday Isaiah 1-2; Psalm 52; Proverbs 22:26-27 Isaiah 2:1-5
As you begin Isaiah, let your heart dwell on the weight of God’s rejection of Israel; ponder the desolation and ruin God pronounces on his people and realize that it’s a desolation and ruin you ought to share. Let your heart mourn, allow sorrow into your midst because of your state before the holy Father of heaven. Then read Isaiah 2:1-5 and feel the release of the burden, the lift of the weight at the proclamation of what God’s total rule will be like for his people whom he draws back to himself. ‘They will beat their swords into plows...nation will not take up sword against nation nor train for war anymore’ – God will turn warriors into gardeners, destruction into cultivation. That is the peace Jesus has won for you and the hope of rest that you can enjoy today through faith in Him.

Sunday Isaiah 3-5; Psalm 53; Proverbs 22:28-29 Isaiah 4:2-6
The Branch of the Lord refers directly to the descendent of David who would permanently deliver God’s people from exile, cleanse with judgment and fire and establish a permanent shelter and refuge. Isaiah will fill pages with promises of blood and judgment and the only means of escape is by God’s grace, by a free gift that our Father gives us, that we do not earn. Here Isaiah promises that the most perfect display of God’s grace will come and will be beautiful and glorious. The full body of the Scriptures reveals that Isaiah was speaking of Jesus. He is the beautiful, glorious bringer of shelter and refuge – praise Him today!

BENEDICTION
Come Lord Jesus!

