Living Life as a Gift

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

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Our death provides us with the perspective we need to live life as a gift from God. This perspective can change us from people who want to control life for their own personal gain and transform us into people who find deep joy in receiving life as a gift from God. This is the primary message of Ecclesiastes. Life is a gift from God, not gain from personal achievement.

1. Happiness – The Great Human Pursuit (1:12-2:11)
   1. Solomon gave himself to pursuing wisdom only to learn that learning doesn’t bring happiness (1:12-18).
      1. Instead of finding happiness, all he finds is anxiety of spirit (13-15).
      2. The more he learned, the more unhappy he became (16-18).
   2. Solomon gave himself to pursuing pleasure and accomplishment only to learn that these things don’t bring lasting happiness (2:1-11).
      1. He pursued pleasure and found diminishing returns (2:1-3).
      2. He pursued accomplishments only to find emptiness (2:4-11).
         1. Isaiah 55:1-2 – Our labors alone do not satisfy.
   3. Application: Do you view happiness as a pursuit, or as a gift to be taken?
2. Death – The Unavoidable Human Problem (2:12-23)
   1. Both the wise and the fool will die (2:12-17).
      1. Even though wisdom is better than folly, death lies at the end of both paths (12-14).
      2. Living wisely will not allow you to escape death (15-17).
   2. All our possessions will be left to others (18-23).
      1. The treasures of a life wisely lived can be squandered by a foolish generation (18-21).
         1. Solomon’s own son, Rehoboam, ruled his father’s kingdom very foolishly.
      2. Distractions and diversions become the methods we use to hide ourselves from the reality of death (22-23).
   3. Application: Are you living as if you’ll never die? What are you using to distract or divert your attention from this reality?
3. God’s Gift – The Right Human Perspective (2:24-26).
   1. We should enjoy the life that God has given us, because it is a gift from God (24).
   2. God is the giver of all that is good to be enjoyed (25-26).
      1. We learn to pursue that which is good because it is good rather than that which makes us happy.
      2. Death helps us to realize that our life is short and every moment is a precious gift from God to be enjoyed.
      3. We can learn to enjoy all of life and to see the hand of God in it all.
      4. We have a tendency to use the world around us as leverage for our own purposes to achieve our own goals, but we must learn that life is meant to be enjoyed rather than mastered.
      5. “There is no surplus of joy beyond joy itself. There is indeed no pathway to joy except by refusing to pursue it and to grasp at it” (Iain Provan).
      6. God gives these gifts to those who please Him (26).

Conclusion:

1. What are you pursuing to make you happy?
2. Are you avoiding the thought of your death, or are you living your life in the reality of it?
3. Are you trying to manipulate life, or are you receiving it as a gift?