

Community Group Discussion Questions

“Wisdom and Vanity” Ecclesiastes 4

Sermon Series Title: “Ecclesiastes”

Sermon Series Summary: Everything is vanity without God. But with God, everything matters. This is only possible through the redemption of Christ who lived the perfectly wise life but died the vain death to give us meaning, joy, life, and eternity.

Passage Setting: This is part of the Wisdom section of the Bible. There is a debate as to the authorship of this book, but a majority of scholars believe that Solomon wrote it. It is the counterbalance to the book of Proverbs and can be seen as a sermon. It is also seen as a teaching for the author’s son (12:12) and also a wisdom manual for children.

Summary: This chapter covers a lot of different topics. It touches on the values of life, work, generosity, friendship, and counsel. Jesus is the One who received all the vanity in our passage, in order to bring us into the better and wise life with Him. And through His death and resurrection, He is the Wisdom and King we all need.

Central Truth: *Wisdom works. Wisdom rests. Wisdom befriends. Wisdom listens. This wisdom is through Jesus.*

Sermon Points:

1. The Broken Life
2. The Better Life
3. The Beautiful Life-Giver

Opening Question:

1. What do you think the Bible has to say about the value of life?

(Answers may vary.)

This is a heavy question to start off with. I’m not sure if it’s a good opening question, but it can get the juices flowing. The Bible is pro-life from womb to tomb. It calls us to fight for the life of the unborn. It calls us to fight for the marginalized, needy, and the least of these.

Every time we see suicidal feelings and thoughts in the Bible, it is met with God’s call for life (i.e. Elijah, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah). In all those stories, we see God meeting these characters with His tenderness, love, and kindness. Unlike some in the Christian tradition, we do not believe that this is the unforgivable sin. We believe in the promises of Romans 8 that nothing in

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creation, not even ourselves, can separate us from the love of God in Christ, for those who have professed Christ with their hearts and minds.)

We are back in Ecclesiastes, where we see Solomon cover a variety of topics in Ecclesiastes 4.

Read Ecclesiastes 4.

1. What does Solomon mean in vv. 1-3? How do you feel about that?

(This is sort of disturbing. Solomon refers to all the injustices and brokenness in this world from ch. 3, and he talks about no comfort for the oppressed and the oppressor. The oppressor will never be satisfied, and the oppressed will never be saved. He says that it is better to be dead. But then he says that it is better than both to never have been. What does this mean?)

Solomon is wrestling with the reality of suffering and injustice. In an earthly sense, there seems to be no hope. In the Bible, whenever we see suicide, we see that it is met with God's call for life (see answer in opening question). We must also understand that this perspective is not in view of the gospel. Better is one who has never been, but best is the one who has died and rose again unto everlasting justice, peace, and life. Solomon is longing for such a day.

I love that the Bible is real about the hardships and injustices of life and this world. I love that Solomon is real about the temptation to take our own lives. But it also points us to the hope that is found in the gospel. It's not an easy fix, and it may be something that our minds can comprehend but hearts can take awhile to catch up. But I'm glad that the Bible leaves room for that.

Answers may vary.)

2. Which proverb from this chapter sticks out to you the most? Why or why not?

(Vv. 1-3- Value of life (refer to previous answer)

Vv. 4-8- Value of work. We see how work and toil come from envy. This is absolutely vanity, because it is miserable. There will always be people with more and better. And even if we are the best and have the most, these things will not satisfy. And in 8, we see that it leads to be truly alone.

Solomon also calls us to not be lazy. We eat our own flesh, meaning we consume ourselves. The best course of action is for us to be content with what we have and accomplish. With one hand, we work, and with the other hand, we have rest and quiet.

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Vv. 9-12- Value of friendship. We pick each other up and keep each other warm. This is in the context of work, business, and travel (safety). But this can be applied to church community-accountability, empathy, compassion, restoration, and encouragement.

Vv. 13-16- Value of counsel- we must be like the poor youth who became a great king by listening to counsel, rather than the old, foolish king who did not listen to advice.)

3. How does this chapter point us to Christ?

(Jesus received the opposite of contentment on the cross, even though He lived in generosity and stewardship. He considered us when we did not consider Him, and He was crucified as an enemy to make us friends. He was abandoned by His disciples, betrayed by His people, and forsaken by His Father. He was absolutely alone, even though He poured Himself out to everyone. He experienced this forsakenness, so that we may never be alone as His brothers and sisters. He is the greatest king by His death and resurrection. He received the greatest injustice. Death was not better for Him. Resurrection was best for Him and us. He went through death to the other side, to bring us there with Him for eternity.)

Final Thoughts: *Wisdom peels every layer of life and examines it under a microscope. It shows us the brokenness of this world and ourselves. It leads us to live in wisdom, by clinging to true wisdom Himself, Jesus. In Him, we have true hope and the restoration of all things.*