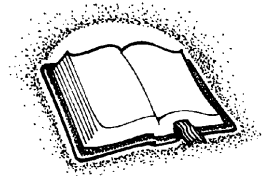


Unlocking the Bible (28)



Under the Sun

Reflection on the Book of Ecclesiastes

Following on the practical exhortation of Proverbs to “*work out your salvation*” Ecclesiastes seems to put that challenge to the test. At first glance it appears that it doesn’t work. The Preacher (Solomon) seems to think that ‘*there is no gain for man from his labour under the sun.*’ Nothing changes and all life follows routinely in a kind of cyclic routine and repetition. *The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises*” There is nothing new: all is routine and repetitive; all is, apparently, meaningless.

In order to test this, he sets out to investigate through wisdom whether that is so. Apparently, it is. Trying learning, pleasure, projects and enterprise, he has to conclude that ‘*there is nothing new under the sun: all is meaningless*’. The examples he gives make very dismal reading. For example,

What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind; What does the worker gain from his toil? ... I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, God gives a man wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

But is that the really the case? Certainly to the godless it is. But the wise have a different perspective.

They are exhorted to: ‘*Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen .. Do not be quick with your mouth.... God is in heaven and you are on earth.*

And ‘on earth’ there is an obligation on man to *enjoy his work, because that is his lot* That theme is repeated frequently in the book. For example, ‘*a man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. And, it is good and proper for a man to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot ... to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God.*

The distinctive of the man who trusts God and is guided by His wisdom is to occupy with diligence the role he has in life. Whatever his hand finds him to do, he is to do it with all his might. He is to be a testimony, a living demonstration of how life should be lived ‘*under the sun*’. The Christian is to be salt and light, the exemplar of the effect of Jesus coming that they might have life and have it more abundantly. Paul put it another way when he described it as a more excellent way.

That is a truth that needs to be grasped as early as possible. *Remember your creator in the days of your youth.* A time will come when it becomes more difficult and less possible because of physical and mental decay.

The book finishes with a simple summary True life is not in searching for greater and more exotic meanings, but in ‘*working out your own salvation*’ The basic principle is: *fear God and keep His commandments.* And, in that way, there will be a significant demonstration of living the life of God, not in an esoteric and monastic existence, but in the ordinary things of life, motivated solely by fear of God and a wish to reflect His goodness and glory.