

May 29

Ecclesiastes 1-2, 4-9

I am standing here in the silk market in Beijing, China. it is a place that is packed with STUFF! Tourists from all around the world come here in order buy stuff cheap. And on every tag is this little saying. "Made in China" The market is packed with stuff from top to bottom and it is very helpful in understanding the book of Ecclesiastes, which we read from today.

Now the author of Ecclesiastes is putting himself in the position of a secular philosopher. In other words, he is looking at trying to find meaning in life without God. That is why he keeps using the phrase "Under the sun". In essence, he is saying 'according to the scientific naturalistic philosophy. But I think "Under the sun" is much more efficient.

So where do you look for meaning without God?

One of the things that you will be discovering as you are reading this book of Ecclesiastes, is that the teacher is very good at asking questions, and not quite so good at giving answers. As long as he is reasoning from his own ability as a human being, as long as his forum is what is 'under the sun,' he is not going to have very many answers. What he says will sound profound, it will seem wise, he will ask all the right questions but the answers keep eluding him.

So he tackles pleasure and says "Go for it. Drink, have sex, pursue pleasure all you want... but you still won't find meaning."

He goes after achievement. "Fine. Get promoted. Reach the highest heights. Become a king. You still die. Your life is as meaningless as the peasant.

He points out the human condition and says - "Not only is the oppression of humanity meaningless, it is painful and depraved as well."

When life is reduced to the five senses, there is nothing but random stimulation. People are just a fortuitous concourse of atoms. We are just amoebas that got lucky. There is nothing meaningful there. We look for it

But nothing is as meaningless as stuff. Wealth. Accumulation. Possessions.

Look around the booth you are in and joke about how meaningless it all is!

Even if it is made in China, super cheap, and you can get a ton of it. It is all meaningless, meaningless.

Dang, if there is no God, life it pretty depressing.

That pessimism comes out again in chapter 4 as the writer says, "I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place 'under the sun'...I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done 'under the sun.'" That is pessimism in the extreme.

But one might also say it is realism in the extreme as well. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes is clear-eyed enough to know that man is by nature perverse and evil, and if given any power and any opportunity at all, he will use it to oppress and to do injustice to other men. That is what mankind without God, without Christ, is really like.

You know, Americans may be the worst culture in the history of humanity in our pursuit of materialism. You ever noticed that people park their \$15,000 car in the driveway because there is so much junk in their two car garage that they can't get in? Cheap junk inside, expensive car outside. What's wrong with that picture?

The storage business is one of the fastest growing in America. Because when we run out of room in our houses, we buy another place to keep the stuff we just can't part with.

Even if you DO have enough money to buy something, you probably buy way too much. I know I do. So maybe the next time you wind up at WalMart or Target, or the other U.S. equivalents of the silk market - (which, notably also have a ton of Made in China labels!) The next time you are there... look around and quote from Ecclesiastes.

Meaningless, meaningless everything is meaningless... everything under the Sun.

That is the S-U-N.

Because you and I both know that everything IS meaningful under the Son... that is the S-O-N.