

Prestonwood Connection

Life Search

Ecclesiastes

May 17, 2006 • Dr. David McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, Solomon's Journal About A Life Search]

Thank so you very much for a..., sharing that song with us tonight. It was on May 21st, just a few days from today, 1937, that a young woman by the name of Amelia Earhart, along with her navigator, a man by the name of Fred Noonan, got on board a rebuilt aircraft called the Electra and made their way from Los Angeles, (Oakland?) California to Miami, Florida. They stopped in Miami and were there for a few days before they would launch what would be a...a global expedition. They were going to make an attempt under the guidance of the flight of Amelia Earhart to fly around the world. And so on June 1st, 1937 they took off from Miami and began the trek that was intended to take them around the world and back to the California coast. Before the flight there was an interview done with Amelia Earhart and she said:

"I have a feeling that there is just about one more good flight left in my system and I hope this trip is it. Anyway, when I finish this job I mean to give up long distance "stunt" flying."

She had done a number of things that had brought her to prominence and profile at that time and she said if I can just get through this, I think this is probably gonna be the last of these types of events. Now, Amelia Earhart had become the darling of American during the 1930's. Her bravery and her courage as the first woman to fly across the Atlantic and all of the other things that she had done had captured the attention and the heart of the nation. And of course, in days when America had been overshadowed by a great depression, there was something about the spirit of Amelia Earhart that...that brought encouragement and inspiration to people everywhere. But the trip that would in fact mark American and aviation history was a trip that ended in tragedy, because on July 2nd, Amelia Earhart departed from New Guinea with 1000 gallons of fuel and set on a projected path across what would take her over the Howland Islands for a final stop before Earhart and Noonan would make their final trek back to California, but somehow, somewhere, someway they never made it to the Howland Islands and Earhart and Noonan and the Electra have never, since that time, been found. There's a lot of uncertainty about the final moments of the flight and uncertainty about the whereabouts. And one of the more interesting things is that there was some uncertainty, even in Amelia Earhart's own journal, because the last words that she recorded in her journal on July 1st, 1937 said this:

"Not much more than a month ago I was on the other shore of the Pacific looking westward. This evening I look eastward over the Pacific. In those fast moving days, which have intervened, the whole width of the world has passed behind us, except this broad ocean. I shall be glad when we have the hazards of this navigation behind us."

Amelia Earhart knew that everything they'd done was good, but possibly the hardest of all feats was yet to be accomplished and in the end there was no other shoreline. Speculation has been made since that time about what happened and many have tried to reconstruct and to identify the exact location of the flight, but here 60 years later there's still a life search, there's still a search going on with questions and unresolved issues about what happened and why it happened and how it happened to Amelia Earhart and the fact of the matter is no one really knows.

Now, in contrast to that final journal entry that we have of Amelia Earhart, unsure about what the future would hold, there is another journal that I want to introduce you to tonight, it is a journal that is found in *The Bible*. It is the book of *Ecclesiastes* and I want you to open this journal because here we find the words of a man who wrote some entries in his journal about his own life search. But in contrast to the words of Earhart, that were uncertain, frankly the words of Solomon that we read tonight were certain. They were clear, they were confident and frankly they were cynical. They were words that reveal the heart of a man who was absolutely sure about what he thought and what he believed about life and about the future and though his life search and his life trek was different than that of Amelia Earhart, I believe that in this book we find some of the great questions and some of the great issues that are a part of the life search of so many in our day and our time and in our culture. *The Bible* is a book that's addressed for people on a life search and in particular the book of *Ecclesiastes* addresses these issues on a personal level like no other. And so tonight I want you to get to know Solomon in a little different way. Most of you have some familiar point of reference with Solomon as the wisest man who ever lived. He was a man who wrote the *Proverbs* and the *Proverbs* provide us wisdom for life and right now we're studying, as you well know on Sunday, in this pulpit, a whole series of messages called *Smart Homes, Wise Families*; and we're trying to add wisdom to daily life and we think of Solomon and his wisdom or we go to another book that bears his name, *The Song of Solomon*, and it's all about love, it's all about romance, it's all about a... the love connection of life. But the book of *Ecclesiastes* is in contrast to those. It is a book about a search, it is a journal, it is a journal that talks about Solomon's quest to find meaning in life and at the very beginning of this journal he opens with a conclusion. Have you ever been to a movie where you're watching the movie, but we...you learn as you go along that the movie started at the end. You may not have known it at the time, in fact you spent time in the movie tryin to figure it out, but they actually started at the end and then took you back on the journey.

Well, that's exactly what Solomon does in the book of *Ecclesiastes*. He

starts with...

A CONCLUSION. So, let's start with his conclusion in *Ecclesiastes*, chapter 1 and beginning in verse 2, here's what he says:

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Now, I know today when we use the word vanity, most often we use it as a word that talks about appearance. You're So Vain, as Carle Simon sang and no one's ever really known for sure who she sang it about. So it's all about vanity and about being vain, but the fact of the matter is, the word vanity really means empty. And so here's a man who identifies himself as a preacher and who wants to hear his message if he stands up and says empty, it's all empty, all of life is just emptiness? But that's what Solomon said and he picked up on that idea down in verse 3:

³What profit has a man for all of his labor In which he toils under the sun? ⁴One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. ⁵The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it rose. ⁶The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continuously, And comes again on its circuit. ⁷All the rivers run into the sea, And yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers run, There they return again. ⁸All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, and There is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us.

Sunrise, Sunset, life goes on, the same cycle, the same circle, the same event. About the time we think this is new, this is modern, this is a discovery, we find that somebody has already done it before, long ago. And Solomon said when I look at life and I take the full view of what life is from beginning to end, it's all one big cycle and frankly it all ends in the same place, it's ashes to ashes, dust to dust, life is vain, life is empty. Boy, that doesn't exactly encourage you does it? [slight congregation laughter] That's the kind of message you hear and you don't wanna say amen, you wanna say pass the Prozac, right? I mean, you know, you don't tend to wanna write these words down and to say this is some...one of those motivational maxims I'm gonna put on my walk:

...*"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*

It's not an inspirational thought that you stick on a card and put in your car at the place in the mirror in the morning where you just say...well a mirror might be a great place.

...*"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*

It's all...it's all goin down the tubes in time. But you see what I'm

saying? Solomon starts and from the start he's saying, hey let me tell you what I think about life; it's all one big empty experience. It was T. S. Elliot who said:

"We humans cannot bear very much reality."

And one of the things that makes us very uncomfortable is that when we read someone talk about life in this manner, sadly we know that somehow that's true, that for all that we strive to do and all that we strive to have and all that we strive to experience and to accomplish, that it all is something that comes and it's something that goes. None of us can ultimately hold on to it. That's why Henry David Thoreau wrote the words that many of us are familiar with that simply says:

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

There're not just *Desperate Housewives*, heh, there are a lot of desperate people, they're livin their life with an itch, with an emptiness, with an ache, with a hunger and they can't figure out how do I fill the void of life. I don't think today that people live lives of quiet desperation, I believe that today if we were to say that same thing, we would have to say that most men live lives of active desperation and dissatisfaction. We're active, we're busy, we're going, we're moving, but the sad thing is...is that underneath it all we too are finding that there is an emptiness to life. And so therefore where Solomon starts is where many of us live, we're living every day searching for something more, something else, something that will ultimately fill the ache and the emptiness inside. So that's where he started, that's what he said and frankly it's so dominate it almost makes you wanna close the book and say I don't wanna read this any more. But you have to remember this is the wisest man who ever lived and could it be that the wisest man who ever lived may have started at a conclusion so that he could get us to make a journey with him that might take us to a new discovery. Well that's exactly what he did in this book. Now, how did he come to this conclusion?

Well, that's the second thing that we look at tonight and that is...

A CONFESSION. A confession, and the confession that Solomon makes well really it's here in the verses that follow. He goes on to say that he began to search. Look in ~~verse 1...~~ verse 13, he says:

¹³I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. ¹⁴I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed all is vanity and grasping of the wind.

Solomon said let me just tell you, what I believe I came to because I searched it, I tried it, I did it. This is not the voice of philosophy, this the voice of experience! And Solomon was making a public confession and the confession is really found in chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3 and so forth as he says I searched, I made, I acquired, I gathered, I

indulged, I did all these things, I mean folks I've done it all, is what Solomon says, you name it I've done it, been there, done that. That was Solomon's word on life. It was a highly experiential statement on his part. I tasted it, I tried it, I tested it. Now, if I could summarize Solomon's search and Solomon's journey by taking all the things that he talks about in 2 or 3 of the chapters here in the book of *Ecclesiastes* and put em together, I...I really could put it all in one simple word, Spam...Spam...S-P-A-M. Now, how you interpret that word has everything to do with where you are generational. For some of you Spam is undesignated meat that came in a can, right? [congregational laughter] That's what Spam is, it's some kind of a meat. How many of you have ever eaten Spam? I just wanna know, good Texas beef eaters, but you've all had Spam, right? Can I just confess to you that in the early days of our marriage, one of our great meals was barbequed Spam? [more laughter] And we ate it on a regular basis. Now, I haven't had Spam now in years and frankly when I think of Spam today I don't think as often of the canned meat, as I do something that's a new part of life in the era and the time in which we live and the new "spam" has nothing to do with what you eat, it has everything to do with what pops up on the screen on your computer. Right? You know about that kind of "spam" don't you? Things that get attached to e-mails, things that get attached to websites and you open them and things start popping up and coming up and coming in, you get unsolicited mail and now you've got spam and it's kinda something that comes from nowhere and nobody knows what it is and that's why some people think it's linked to the old meat, heh! No one really knows where it is or where it came from, but in Solomon's like the spam, the clutter, the thing that brought him to this place of experience could simply be defined in a 4-fold fashion, sex, power, accomplishment and money...sex, power, accomplishment and money.

The first thing Solomon did is he said I just indulged myself, I just went for my urges, whatever I felt like doing I did and I did not inhibit myself in any way. I was a rich man, I was a high profile man, I didn't have any constraints because I made the laws and therefore I decided that I would just live to indulge. But in the end after all of the pleasure, all of the parties and all of the things that he did Solomon said you know what? This is very empty, life is shallow, oh I may be able to get some sense of momentary gratification, but I can tell you life has no satisfaction in pleasure.

Then he went on to talk about not only that, but about the whole idea of his power, his platform, his prominence, that he became a man who could make things happen and therefore people knew him and people looked to him and people a..., came around him in all of his power. He...he would...would use that sometimes good, sometimes bad, but many people try to gain power and platform and prominence in life. Solomon said this is empty too.

And then he talked about his accomplishments, he built buildings, he created civic centers, he did all kinds of things for his people, they were good things, from a good king, but for all of the accomplishments and all of his labors and all of the things that he poured his life into Solomon said I still came up empty, it was still a sense of vanity.

And so then I just bought whatever I wanted, I had it anyway, it was mine, gold and silver and precious stones, the finest garments, the best meals, I did it all, but Solomon said in the end the confession was the same, spam left me empty. Experience, excess, it's a fascinating story to read in the book of Ecclesiastes, the things that he did, the things that he tried, the things that he thought, but it all brought him to the same conclusion:

...“Vanity of vanities, All is vanity.”

Empty, all of life is empty. So ~~he had a confession, it was a confession that he came to...excuse me~~ he had a conclusion that he confessed and he came to it because he made the confession, I tried it, I did it, this is a word of experience. We've often said experience is the best teacher, that's exactly what Solomon said, he said this is my experience.

But there's a third element that you need to see with me tonight and that is...

A CONTEXT. The reason that he came to this conclusion and that he made this confession is because everything about Solomon was limited to and confined to a specific context. One of the things we always say in Bible Study, is that it's important to read a Scripture in context.

You know we've all heard about people who've tried to do the lucky dip method of Bible Study. You know that, right? Heard about the guy that did that and he just said Lord I need a word from You God, help me, speak to me, you know, look down, put his finger on the Bible and it said Judas went out and hanged himself. [congregation laughter] He said well Lord that doesn't encourage me very much, I need You to guide me. What do you want me to do? So he tried it again and he closed his eyes and he put his finger up in the air and he said Lord lead me and he put it down and it said go and do thou likewise. [more laughter] he was feeling extremely desperate, he said oh God help me, help me, Lord speak to me, he tried for a third time and it said whatever you do, do quickly. Heh! [more laughter] I mean, you know, I...it's sometimes in life we're just tryin to get a word, we're tryin to get an answer so that's why in Bible Study you always gotta have a context, you gotta study the Scripture in the context. Well, what was his context? Why did he come to this conclusion? Solomon said it clearly when he said:

...There's nothing new...

Here's the word.

...under the sun.

You see the problem with all of Solomon's search is that it was all something that was happening under the sun. His view of life was driven by what it was to live under the sun and therefore everything that he tried,

everything that he tested, everything that he tasted was all something that had to do with life under the sun, 27 times in the book of *Ecclesiastes* he repeats that phrase, under the sun...under the sun...under the sun and really what he came to is what so many people do come to in life, even people who attain great things in life is that sometimes in life there is less to life than meets the eye. You know you've heard the expression there's more to life than meets the eye? But you know one of the great tragedies is, is that sometimes when we do what we do just to appease the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or ~~the prides~~...the pride of life, that there's less to life than meets the eye and that was Solomon's experience, because of his wealth, because of his fame, because of his fortune, his prominence, he was a man who didn't have to wonder how would life be if. You see when people don't have anything in life, when they're poor and needy and desperate, they think if I could just get this maybe it would matter and it gives them a sense of hope that someday, somehow, they're gonna tap in, they're gonna have their ship come in and maybe then they're gonna find what they need to have a satisfied life. But you see for Solomon he had all that and he said when I had it all then I really knew...I really knew that life under the sun is limited, life under the sun doesn't connect, it is simply inadequate. And so then he talks in *Ecclesiastes* 3, all about the times and the seasons of life. The strange thing is that when he looked at life and all that he did and then he thought about life, he said there and of course you know this:

¹To everything there's a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: ²A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck up what's planted; ³A time to kill, And a time to heal;...

It's almost like as he talks about the time, the time, the time that you can hear the ticking of the clock, tick, tick, tick as you read *Ecclesiastes* chapter 3. Solomon said as I looked at life and I looked at time all I could think of there's gotta be more to life than this. And what Solomon was discovering in his life is what a philosopher many years described in this way...many years later:

"There's a God shaped vacuum in every heart of man which cannot be filled."

"There's a God shaped vacuum in every heart of man which cannot be filled."

For all the things that Solomon tried to do to fill up the desperation of an empty soul and an empty life, the things that he thought that would matter, didn't and he found himself like many people in our world today surrounded by bottles of water and dying of thirst. We live in a culture today where bottled water is everything. But bottled water, no matter how plentiful still is being fed to people with an empty soul. That's why Solomon said in *Ecclesiastes* 3 and verse 11 after he looked at life and looked at all these things he said of God:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. And He had put eternity in

our hearts, except that no one can find out the work of God that He does from the beginning to the end.

What I so long to know, to see, to experience is something that can only happen in my life if I begin to see life from God's perspective. So from chapter 3 thru chapter 11 in the book of *Ecclesiastes*, we see a man with...

A CONFLICT, a conflict. He starts with a conclusion, he makes a confession, he has this context of life under the sun and then he's a man who has sense of conflict and the conflict of his life is that no matter what he does there isn't satisfaction under the sun. To quote that great theologian Mick Jagar, Solomon said:

"I can't get no satisfaction. I try and I try and I try, but I can't get no satisfaction."

Isn't it interesting that that's still the greatest, most popular, most played rock song of all time, people in search of satisfaction. It was Sigmund Freud who said:

"The meager satisfaction that a man can extract from reality leaves him starving."

And that's exactly what Solomon said in his journal. Listen to *Ecclesiastes* 1, verses 8 and 9, he says here:

⁸All things are wearisome, Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹That which has been, that which will be. That which is done is that which will be done, And there's nothing new under the sun.

And Solomon lived in this incredible conflict, that he was stuck in life without answers, lots of questions and the process of the journey led him to the right questions, but he was striving, he was despairing, he was grasping, he was craving, there was a conflict. I believe that a lot of people are living this conflict in life, people who are making great incomes, people who are driving nice cars, people who are known by many, but deep down inside there is an ache and a hunger for life that matters. It was so evident this year when a..., Reese Witherspoon won the Oscar for her role in a..., *Walk The Line*, a story of the life of ~~Johnny and June Carter~~ or Johnny and June Cash and she came to accept the award and when she did she said a..., in a very gracious way she made a speech, but she said in the end you know I just have to say that for all the things that I do, really my life, like so many people's lives can be summed up in the words of June Carter Cash.

"I'm just tryin to matter."

"I'm just tryin to matter!"

Isn't that really what we all want in life? We just really want to matter

and that's where Solomon found himself in a conflict over what does it take to matter in life. Well, fast forward with me to the 12th chapter of *Ecclesiastes*. It's the last chapter of the book. It's the final part of the journey, he hits bottom in chapter 11, it's a great place to hit bottom, by the way, chapter 11, he's bankrupt, he's empty, he wants to know the answer. And what you have in chapter 11 are the confessions of a man in chapter 11, he's hit bottom and now things are starting to turn around and so what we find in chapter 12 is...

A CONNECTION. I can't preach about these things without commin to the connection, right? Where's the connection service? We gotta make the connection and so tonight Solomon makes the connection and here it is chapter 12, verse 1:

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

Suddenly there is something that's happened, something clicks in Solomon's life and no longer is he now caught in the conflict, caught in the trap of an empty life, he says, you know what? I see it differently today. If I could do all of this over again here's what I would say to you, don't focus on life under the sun, remember your Creator in the days of your youth. It's not the creation that makes life matter, it's the Creator that makes life matter and when you begin to discover what it means to be rightly related to the Creator then it will change everything in your life under the sun. And that's the discovery of the book of *Ecclesiastes*. Life doesn't have to be a search, it can be a discovery. And he begins in chapter 12 to talk about this new life connection that changes everything. Did it change his life? You better believe it. Go to the last 2 verse of the book of *Ecclesiastes*, verse 13 and 14, because now he doesn't end with a conclusion, he ends with...

A CONVICTION. He started with a conclusion, but he ended the book with a conviction and the conviction at the end of the book is completely different than what he started with at the beginning of the book. Yes, he came to a conclusion, but the conclusion that he had there, is different from what he had, when he had his conviction at the end of the book and what was that conviction? Here it is:

¹³Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. ¹⁴For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or bad.

All of life is not about today. All of life is about tomorrow. Life isn't about these moments and this experience, because your life is not limited to these moments and this experience. Yes, life under the sun matters. Yes, there are relationships and demands and experiences and joys and pleasures and frankly Solomon highlights all those things along the way, but ultimately life will never fit together until you come to the place in life that you realize that it's all about eternity. It's all about the God

who made you for Himself and having a relationship with Him. That's why the prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 20...Jeremiah, chapter 9, verse 23 and 24:

²³... *"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,*

There's Solomon!

...Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord.

You wanna boast about something? You want life to really matter? It will only matter if you know God and if you live your life for His pleasure and not for your own. That was Solomon's conviction. That was what changed everything in his life and I for one believe that the depth and the insight and the wisdom of *Proverbs* was written because of the breath and the search of life that was done in *Ecclesiastes*. While it's *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Solomon* in *The Bible* that we pick up, I believe *Ecclesiastes* preceded *Proverbs* because it was the experience that gave him the wisdom to talk about life. So what does all this mean? Well, it really comes down to the final word for you and me and that's...

A COMMITMENT, a commitment, he begins chapter 12 with:

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,...

And then he ends it with:

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments,...

It all comes down to the need in every individual life to have an encounter and to engage in a commitment with God, to make a life connection as we so often talk about here, that will change your life forever. That's when life begins. There are a whole group of people in this room who could stand up and say my life began when I met Christ. Now the problem is as believers living in this world we get caught up in the system around us, we get trapped under the sun and before long our real view of life begins to dim and that's where the book of *Ecclesiastes* comes along and helps us to...to get a fresh perspective, to...to see it afresh and anew. It's like putting drops in a red eye and suddenly the pain and the sting is gone and I see life again in a fresh and a new way. And God uses His Word to believers in our lives, to take us back to that passionate pursuit of knowing God, but He also uses this word to remind us that the search that so many are on today will always prove empty until people come to a time and a place and a moment where they respond to the God who made them, where their life is complete, not because of something they gained from the creation, but because of a connection that they've made with the Creator. It's incredible to me the change, the flip that takes place

between the first in this book and the last of this book and yet that's what happens in a person's life when they see their need for God, when they repent of their sin and when they confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. You see God came into a world filled with searching, empty, imperfect people. He put His Son Jesus Christ as the perfect, full and abundant Man and Jesus took our sin and suffering to the cross so that we might experience the life, the hope and the peace that He gives to us. Is it a life free of trouble, a life that's easy? No, none of those things, but it's a life that's full and meaningful that He provides for us.

Not long ago I looked on the front page of US Today newspaper and many times they have, right there on the front page those little snapshots, they're like little quick surveys, little quick facts...factoids, if you will, of things in life and I...I read there that a..., the most common street name in America, 4th Street came in 5th place, 1st Street came in 4th place, 3rd Street came in, well 3rd, heh, Main Street was 2nd, but do you know what the #1 street name was in 7972 streets in America? 2nd Street, 2nd I think that's neat. You know why? Because it wasn't 1st Street if was 2nd Street that changed Solomon's life and for you and for me it's not the 1st experience, it's not the first way that we go, it's the 2nd way and by God's grace He's a God who gives us a second chance. Isn't that great? He's a God who always gives us 2nd Street and my prayer tonight is that God will use this little message about A Life Search, to help to get you to 2nd Street so that you don't live and exasperated, desperate life, but that you begin to get on the street that will ultimately take you to a full and a meaningful life knowing and following Jesus Christ.