

Solomon's Answer to Carl Sagan

Intro: In our morning lesson we looked at the philosophy that stands behind much of the value change we see in our society today. The philosophy can be variously described as secularism, humanism, or atheism. Its most fundamental tenet is the belief as articulated by popular scientist Carl Sagan, "The earth is all that there is, ever was, and ever will be."

Tonight I want to talk about Solomon's answer to Sagan. Let's turn to Ecclesiastes. Of all the books in the Bible, this book seems more and more relevant to the thinking of modern man. As strange as it sounds, Ecclesiastes is now even being actively used in evangelism studies with non-Christians. Because it starts where many modern people are (unhappy and unfulfilled) and shows them what has been missing. In a word, God.

WHY LIFE IS SO MEANINGLESS FOR SO MANY PEOPLE

A wrong-headed view of the world

For the past century people have constantly been bombarded with the notion that God is dead and the thought of him is irrelevant to a meaningful life. They are told:

The earth and our place in it is all there is.

God does not exist; but is an invention of man's ignorance.

The world came into being by accident and proceeds by the principle of "survival of the fittest".

Man has the power to govern himself without the need for external guidance.

Autonomous man, making his own discoveries, seeking his own answers to life's problems.

A person who embraces these tenets is headed for a meaningless life because, the person driven by the secularist world view will adopt...

A wrong-headed approach to living

Every day we can hear the secularist message in music, movies, media and conversation. Here's how the world would answer the question, "What are the keys to a meaningful life?"

A life without external controls—maximum personal liberty, answer to no one, "do your own thing"

A life of luxury--the quest for pleasure, accumulation of status symbols, materialism

A life of lust, a playboy philosophy of love--no responsibility, no commitment, no rules manifests in "free love" or casual sex

A life of minimal effort & maximum relaxation--no work, everyone serving you

A life of worldly achievement and recognition--get the world's attention, be powerful, be influential, be remembered

Our world is constantly being shaped by these values. The media constantly promotes them and the vast population of the world accepts them. Many people believe that they will never find satisfaction until this is the way they live! Even Christians are often lured by this lifestyle. But, is this the answer?

SOLOMON'S EXPERIMENT

Solomon had the opportunity to do what most people will never be able to do. He had everything with which to test this worldly concept of meaning and happiness. He had the wealth, the power, and the time to test it. And when he did he reported the results:

“I SAID to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:1–11, NASB)

Again and again he would see how the worldly approach could not make one truly happy or satisfied with life. It all led to “vanity” and even helps us understand the reasons why.

But in the process he found the real “secrets” to meaningful living and presented them in the wise sayings scattered throughout this book.

Solomon’s observations stand every worldly concept we considered on its head!

SOLOMON'S “SECRETS” TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE

It all begins with a proper view of the world.

Instead of saying the world is all there is, Solomon urges to realize that there is a God who is the Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all that there is!

The world is not an accident; it is the creation of a powerful and sovereign God who has arranged everything to work to the fulfillment of His purposes.

“He has made everything appropriate in its time” (Eccl. 3:11). I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

Instead of saying man can do it on his own, Solomon urges us to see that God gives man the guidance needed to live well.

Solomon affirmed that man is not capable of taking it all in and developing on his own a philosophy that will result in meaningful living; instead he needs to respect the Creator and do what He says!

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Instead of saying our ultimate satisfaction is in this world, Solomon urges us to see that ultimate meaning is in God and the blessings He grants to us.

For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. (Ecclesiastes 9:1)

If secularism results in wrong-headed living, a proper world view results in wise and meaningful living! Solomon gives us the keys to meaningful living:

Surrender control of your life to God!

The first of these is implicit in the passages that we’ve already read: Fear Him and keep His commandments; trust Him to bless you!

How “free” is the self-willed person? Not very! He is often addicted and enslaved to the objects of his lust! But the servant of God knows true freedom, not to do as he pleases but to do as he ought! He finds abundant life by choosing to follow the instructions of the Creator.

Learn to enjoy what He has given you!

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. (Ecclesiastes 2:24)

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)

When do you have enough? What good is a millionaire who has ulcers, missed the best moments in his children's lives, and goes home to strangers every night?

Think about the blessings of contentment. Contentment allows us to enjoy what God has given us rather than fret about what we don't have! It frees us to enjoy the people around us and to build relationships rather than merely collect stuff!

Love the wife God has given you!

Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

Playboys and playgirls are often just love-starved people looking for a way out of pain. But the truth is, sexual "freedom" leads to more pain—disease, broken relationships, and personal emptiness.

But think how beautiful it is when two people really love each other and commit to live together and meet each other's needs. Every day they know better how to please each other and their love deepens more and more with time!

Use productively the time God has given you.

Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

So most of the world longs for retirement; but for what? Is anyone really happy with absolutely nothing to do? Solomon found the opposite was true. Real satisfaction comes when we busy ourselves with meaningful occupation.

Think how satisfying it is to think back upon a day spent in productive pursuits and to enjoy a genuine tired and a good night's sleep. Think about what it's like to realize that you are not some working "has been" but someone who still has something worthwhile to do with your life!

Come to terms with the reality of death!

Realize that God has placed limits on your life; there is no earthly "immortality". Solomon stressed two important facts about life:

For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

All of us will die and our earthly pursuits will come to an end.

It is futile to imagine that we will be remembered very long past our deaths.

An interesting exercise would be to see if you can make a list of a hundred people who lived before 1900 whose

names are not found in the Scriptures themselves. Out of the billions who have lived on earth, very few have been remembered very long past their own generation! How many of you could name your great, great grandfather?

But think of the blessing of confronting the reality of death. Yes, you never know what tomorrow will bring; but you know that every day is a gift from God and that it is important to live it to the full! Living in this faith can change our lives immeasurably for good!

Conclusion: You see, the worldly standard of happiness is wrong on every point! Ecclesiastes teaches us as godly people not to think that happiness is "out there" in sin; but rather to know that the true meaning of life and the way to happiness is found in knowing God and doing His will.

Often those who profess to live the worldly life to the fullest put on the greatest face and pretend that everything is wonderful. It becomes a way to mask deep sadness and a lack of fulfillment. Each of knows what is within and what is there will tell us a lot about where we are with God. That void inside will never be filled by anything earthly. That restless feeling that you seek to find relief from will not go away until we die inside or until we give our life back to the God who gave life to us! Will you do this?