

A Depressing Book

King Solomon has written a very depressing book.

Now let me clarify a bit. The book of Ecclesiastes is depressing because it shows the evils of this life. That is not the final word for us, yet it is a word that needs to be heard and understood.

Ecclesiastes is full of doom and despair. Although many preachers nowadays only try to give people hope for this life, Solomon preaches despair - despair of all the labour we do under the sun, despair even of all human wisdom and knowledge and skill.

So I tell you also: Do not put your hope in this life. In this life, you will work hard all of your days. But when you reach the end, and perhaps you accumulated some riches and property, it will all be for nothing. You cannot take it with you. You will leave everything to someone else, and who knows if he will put it to good use or just waste it all?

Hard work is therefore useless in the end. Yet laziness is even worse. You cannot escape the hard work - you are bound to do it for family, for food, for obedience. But in the end, you are only going round and round in circles. You are building sand castles that will surely be destroyed by the tide.

We are bound as slaves to hard labour because of sin. We are under the curse of Adam: *“Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”*

Because of this curse, every labour of man is ultimately futile, foolish, and frustrated. *“Absolutely pointless!”* preaches Solomon, because all our labour ends in death.

Therefore, despair of this life. See its emptiness. Know that every joy is fleeting. Know that death overtakes us all.

Despair also in the works of your hands - that is, your good works. Every work that you do is flawed and futile because of your sinful nature. The more you try, the more you will despair, because even your best, most righteous deeds are like filthy rags. If you try to make progress in your good deeds, it will be as fragile as a house of cards - certain to collapse in the end. Our good works are doomed for failure, and we will finally receive the wages of our sin, which is death.

So despair of this present life. Do not put your hope in earthly things, but trust instead in God.

There is nothing new under the sun. But God is not under the sun, but above it. He is not bound under the curse of Adam. He makes perfect works, and His labours are always fulfilled. He does not end in dust, but continues forever in immortality.

Yet God, who is above the curse, became a man to place Himself under the Law and under the curse. He tasted death upon Calvary after suffering horrible torment. The worst of Adam's curse struck down Jesus of Nazareth, even though in all His works, He had been completely righteous.

How futile the life of Christ appears! He spent all His time doing good for others, but His works all seemed to be for nothing. Instead of reward, He was dealt ultimate punishment as the worst criminal of all time. Shame and pain were heaped upon Him who deserved glory.

Yet His work is not futile after all. If He had been merely a sinful man, then His death would also be futile and foolish but His death overcame and overwhelmed the rules of our cursed life under the sun. He changed everything at Calvary. Death became victory. What seemed to be failure was the best, most effective work that can ever be done, because it has earned the salvation of every man under the sun.

His death is so much better than the death of any other man. An ordinary man dies, and the inheritance he passes on is uncertain, for who knows what fool will destroy the inheritance? But Christ Jesus died, and He has left a sure and certain inheritance called the New Testament. This inheritance is eaten and drunk in the holy meal of His Body and Blood. The inheritance is eternal life in Paradise without any curse. We have inherited the forgiveness of all the sins that cursed us in the first place.

God died on the Cross, and the rules got all messed up. That's a good thing, because the old rules were sin and death and decay. In the new rules, the death of Christ is no tragedy, but instead a victory and reversal of the curse. He became cursed, and we became blessed. To show how the rules had changed, Christ rose from the grave without experiencing decay.

So I repeat to you: Despair over this cursed life. In itself, this life is hopeless and futile. But rejoice all the more in Christ Jesus, in whom your life is hidden. Although you must still labour under the curse, your eyes are pointed to Paradise, where Christ shall forever remove the curse of Adam for you, and give you a resurrection body that has none of the effects to the curse in it at all.

