

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 29: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon & Isaiah 1-11, *Sorrow, Sex, and Wisdom*

Welcome to Week 29 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters, and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we'll be reading two books, and we will start a third. We'll also move from one section of the Bible Library to a different section of the Bible Library. We will start with the writings of Solomon, as the last two poetry books, we will end with the first few chapters of Isaiah, which is the first of the prophets that appears in the Bible.

With Solomon, Israel was at its peak. And last week, we saw the book of Proverbs, which is an assembly of various writings of wisdom, some of which were Solomon's. This week, we're going to take a look at what he wrote at the end of his life, the book of Ecclesiastes, and we'll read a book that he probably wrote at the very beginning of his writings, at least, when he was a younger man, in the book, A Song of Solomon sometimes called the Song of Songs.

So let's take a look at these books, starting with the book of Ecclesiastes, which is what we'll get to first, as we come into this week, the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon at the end of his life. And it was written at a time after he'd compromised his values, because of his idol worshiping wives, you can't blame his wives entirely. He made the choice to marry them, he made the choice to go along with their pagan ideas and their pagan worship rather than staying with the worship of Jehovah God. So it's mutual blame going on here. In the meantime, his sons were plotting Solomon's demise. They knew he was older, and he would be leaving the throne soon, and his sons started plotting about who would get the kingdom. And it was son fighting against son. This was a time of great prosperity in the nation. And now the prosperity of the nation which was originally God's blessing was now consuming the nation. As often happens, God blesses us, and then we concentrate on the blessings rather than the God who gave us the blessings. And the blessings often become a curse.

So this is an old, depressed, lonely, wealthy, morally compromised King, who sits down to write this book. You have to understand that when you pick it up, otherwise Ecclesiastes just comes out of the blue and you go, What in the world is happening here? You have to understand who wrote it, and when he wrote it, the first verse actually tells you everything that you need to know about the book. Ecclesiastes 1:1 says this, "The words of the Teacher, son of David, King in Jerusalem." So from that first verse, we know who it is. Son of David? King in Jerusalem? Calls himself the teacher? There's no other person that can be, historically, but Solomon. Ecclesiastes 1:2 then continues with this "Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless." Now a couple of really important points about this verse. So the first statement after his introduction is the word "meaningless", and he says it twice, which is really an emphasis. And then he comes back with utterly meaningless, and then he comes back with "Everything is meaningless". Do you get the idea that Solomon thinks everything is meaningless? Yes. But it's really important to note in this verse, he specifically says, "says the teacher". This is not "Meaningless, meaningless", says God. Right? God is not saying everything is meaningless. The teacher and old, depressed, lonely, wealthy, morally compromised King is saying, everything is meaningless. So when you

read that, in that verse this week, take note that sets the tone for the entire book, when you read Ecclesiastes, you are not getting God's opinion about the state of the world. You're getting the opinion of an old, lonely, depressed, morally compromised, wealthy King, who has come to the end of his life and looked around and went living this way is meaningless.

So it's true, living that way is meaningless. But we've got to see who it's coming from, and the place that he's coming from, in order to understand the truth that's actually being stated here. If we read Ecclesiastes, as coming from God's viewpoint, we will miss the meaning of it. We have to see it as coming from the viewpoint of this again, old, depressed, lonely, wealthy, morally compromised King. So how do we know he was old when he wrote it? Several places but here's one example. Ecclesiastes 4:13 tells us "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish King, who no longer knows how to take a warning." He identifies himself as old, as foolish, as a king. And as someone who doesn't know how to take a warning. So this is who wrote it, and this is the perspective we're getting. So with such a bad attitude, and it's such a bad place spiritually and morally. How do we read Ecclesiastes? Quite frankly, it's tricky. So here are some principles to keep in mind as you read the book of Ecclesiastes, in this next week.

First of all, the Bible contains but never condones incorrect statements. Are there incorrect statements in the Bible? Yes. But they're not stated by God. They're stated by others. Okay? The Bible contains incorrect statements, but it never condones those incorrect statements. Solomon was wrong a lot. Like when he starts with "Everything is meaningless". That's not correct. It is correct about how he felt about the world at the time, is correct about how he felt about himself. It's an accurate reflection of his state of mind. But it's not a universal truth that everything is meaningless, it's not. The entire rest of the Bible shows us the great purposes behind what God does and has continued to do. Ecclesiastes 7:16 is another example of that. It says, "Do not be over righteous, neither be over wise." How can you be too righteous? You can be self righteous, but you can't be too righteous, and you can't be over wise. You can be a smart aleck but you can't actually be too wise. He's saying he believes that this season of his life that this became a problem for him, but in fact, is not. So as we read through it, you have to understand this is accurate from Solomon's viewpoint, but it is not necessarily correct from God's viewpoint.

So the bottom line as you're reading through it is this; Don't draw theological conclusions or base your behavior on advice from books like Ecclesiastes. You've got to take a look at how it balances with the rest of the Bible first. So that's one principle to look at as we're going through it. The Bible contains but never condones incorrect statements. Secondly, success is not the same as excess. That's a big lesson that we get out of Ecclesiastes, take a look at what happened to Solomon, he had more wisdom than anyone, and he got bored with it. So what did he do? He chased after pleasure? He'll tell us that several times in this, and he got bored with pleasure. So then what did he do? He amassed the world's greatest fortune, and he got bored with that. So the result is Ecclesiastes 2:17, "So I hated life." Right? You can get bored with these things very quickly. A whole lot of something does not lead to happiness or joy. That's one of the lessons we can gain from it.

Another lesson we can gain as we go through it this week is boredom comes from the scraps of prosperity. Boredom comes from the scraps of prosperity. In Ecclesiastes, universal prosperity makes its first appearance among God's people. And with it, we have the first appearance of absolute boredom. Take a look around today, the people who have the most art

are quite often the most bored and boring people in the world. So how do we fix that? This is another lesson out of Ecclesiastes, it turns out that the little things are actually the big things. Here's a couple places where we see that or as you'll see that as you come up in the this next week. Ecclesiastes 4:6, he says, "Better one handful with tranquility, than two handfuls, with toil." Better to have a little and be happy with it than to have a lot and to not be. Ecclesiastes 3, "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven." This is probably the most famous aspect of this book, right? "A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to tear down, and a time to build." And then he goes on with these other times.

So much of the essence of Ecclesiastes boils down to this. Relax, life is meant to be lived, it's not a goal to be pursued. Love God, love others, that's it. That's your takeaway from Ecclesiastes.

Then we'll move to the Book of Song of Solomon, and things will not get any easier to understand, but they will be a little spicier, won't they? Yeah, Song of Solomon, or sometimes called the Song of Songs, is one of the most controversial books in the Bible. There's a lot of arguments over what it really means. Was it written to his wife? Was it written to his fiancée? Was it written to people he was having affairs with? All of these theories have been floated. Or is it just a metaphor for loving God? That's where a lot of people like to come down on. My belief is that it's to his wife, about their blossoming love. But I'll give you a couple of highlights so you can read it for yourself and you can make up your own mind about what it is.

So here are some points to note as you read the Song of Solomon this week. First of all, God celebrates sensuality and sexuality, but not lust. Now, in our society, quite often we perceive of sexuality and lust as being the same thing and they are not the same thing. So what's the difference? First, and, sensuality, sexuality, lust. In fact, let's look at three words in. Those are often, three of them, perceived almost as synonyms and they're not.

First of all, "sensual". Something can be sensual without being sexual. Sensual means something that enlivens the senses. Eating food is a sensual experience, but it isn't sexual. Cuddling is sensual, but not sexual. Smelling coffee in the morning is sensual. They're all sensual because they come to our senses, but they aren't sexual. So as you go through the Book of Song of Solomon, notice all of the references to sensual things, even sometimes are attached to sexuality, but not as necessarily. All the references to smells, tastes, touch, sound sight, it's a very sensual book and that it enlivens our senses.

So sensuality is about the senses. Sexuality is about our sexuality. And lust, however, isn't that just another word for sexuality? No, lust is destructive. And here's why. Sexual love, treats a person as a person. Lust treats a person as an object. That's the difference. I am sexually attracted to my wife, I do not lust after her. Lust would imply that I am objectifying her. And I never objectify her, but I am sexually attracted to her. Lust destroys. Love and sexuality in its proper biblical context, restores. So let's be aware of that, as we're going through it.

Also, as you're going through this book, be aware that there are three "actors" in this drama. The first actor is called The Lover, this is Solomon, Solomon wrote this. So the lover in this is Solomon, the second actor is called The Beloved, this is the woman that he loves. The third actor is actually a group of actors, but let's see them as one particular group of people and that is the Friends of both the lover and the beloved. These are people who affirmed their relationship, who guard the woman's purity, who helped her to find him when he leaves, and

who approve of their final uniting again, and all three of them are essential to this. If you only look at it as a man and a woman, you're going to miss part of it. It's also what is the role of our what is the role of our closest friends, in our relationships, that matters. There's a reason why when we get married, we have our friends come over as witnesses to our union, why it's important to have our friends and family members there when we get married. Because it's not just about the two of us. It's about the community and the family that we're in being a part of this relationship.

So when Solomon started out, and you know, this is about Song of Solomon is about that time, he had the right idea and the love for the right reasons. And that's reflected in this book. Later on, he gathers trophy wives by the 1000s. And it became his downfall and it leads to Ecclesiastes. So Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon are in the order they should be in the Bible, but they're in reverse chronological order. So realize that as you read them.

And then at the end of the week, we will begin the book of Isaiah, we'll be reading the verse, chapters 1 through 11. This is the first of three weeks that we will be spending in Isaiah. And it's also the first of the book of prophets, and also the first of the major prophets. So there's a lot to cover. This week, I will talk about those aspects who were the prophets. We'll get into the details of Isaiah. And we'll get into what the differences are between the major and minor prophets next week, because we'll be spending a lot of time in Isaiah and we've already covered a lot with Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon this week.

So to finish up as we are, we'll dip our toe into Isaiah this week. Let's talk about a couple familiar passages that you will read out of Isaiah this week. Isaiah 7:14 is where you'll find this passage. "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign, The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." If you've been in church any length of time, especially around Christmas season, you are familiar with that verse. Isaiah 9:6, which I will also read this week says this, "For unto us a child is born to us a Son is given, the government will be on His shoulders, and He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace". Again, very familiar around Christmas season in church. The second one is from Isaiah and that's where we read it. The first one from Isaiah is also usually read from Matthew 1:23, where Isaiah is quoted. We'll get more about Isaiah next in the next couple of weeks.

But for now, let's conclude this particular session this way, as you read Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon this week, recognize that it's from an old man and a young man, but it's the same man. So as you read them in this order, the way I like to picture it is this. Imagine that you're with an old man on his deathbed. And he's talking about how his life is now, Ecclesiastes, and he's reflecting and looking back at his life, how it used to be, Song of Solomon, so he's looking at his most recent life, and his heart aches and that's Ecclesiastes, but he's also remembering the good old days back in Song of Solomon. Okay, that's kind of a way that I like, it helps me understand what's happening there.

Also, we have to remember as we read Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, this is not God speaking to us. Neither one of them is, these are us speaking to God. Or even better, this is a wise but regretful old man speaking to younger men and women about how he learned from his mistakes. If you read it through that framework, you'll have a better clearer understanding of what's going on. And then when we get to Isaiah, at the end of the week, we're going to see that on the other hand, in Isaiah, this is God directly speaking to us, and he's angry. So there's almost emotional whiplash.

This week, there's a lot to cover. It's a challenging, interesting, fun, exciting week to do. Over the next couple of weeks, we'll spend a little more time in Isaiah, we'll get deeper into it, we'll tell you about the prophet, we'll tell you about his message. We'll give you some interesting details about how to get through this very long, wonderful book as we get through them. But for this week, have some fun, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and the beginning of Isaiah. This is going to be an interesting week to get through. I know you'll enjoy it and now hopefully, you'll get some more out of it than you would have by going in blind. Thanks. We'll see you next week.

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