

Chasing After the Wind

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We continue this morning with our summer journey through some of the books of the Old Testament. We have looked at the messages of Daniel, Esther and Habakkuk. I hope you have seen how relevant the messages of these books are to us today. We have an opportunity to get a bird's eye perspective of the Old Testament when Professor Sandy Richter comes Oct 17 & 18. On Saturday morning and Sunday evening she will give an overview of the major themes that flow through the entire Old Testament.

Today we look at the message of Ecclesiastes. Many scholars believe it was written by King Solomon or an author heavily influenced by his wisdom. Solomon was the son of King David. When he became King of Israel, he asked God for one thing: to make him wise. God granted his request. Solomon's wisdom is recorded in the book of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon as well as in Ecclesiastes. Some people question how wise Solomon was because he had 700 wives and 300 concubines!!

Solomon discovered that all his human wisdom was not adequate for understanding or navigating through life. He observed the futility of our earthly ambitions and desires. Listen to some of his observations about life:

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.

¹²Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come:

As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so men are trapped by evil times
that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Solomon uses a powerful phrase to describe our quest for things in this world. He discovers that so much of what occupies our lives is meaningless-- "chasing after the wind." Listen to some examples:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 1:17

I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

Can you imagine anything more absurd than chasing the wind? What a powerful word picture! We can use the wind to turn wind turbines which produce electricity or pump water. We can observe the power of the wind especially in tornadoes and hurricanes. In West Texas we can actually see the wind! We all know that wind is brown! We can feel the wind. We can be blown over by the wind. We can run with the wind. But how ridiculous to chase the wind. It can never be caught—an exercise in futility.

Solomon exposes many pursuits in life that are chasing after the wind. One of those is the pursuit of control. Most of us desire to be in control of our lives. And we believe we ought to be able to control our lives. We spend a great deal of energy trying to make things happen the way we think they should at work, at the church and with our family. If only everyone would do what we tell them to, then everything would be fine! After all, we know what is best for everyone! We like to make our plans and we think everything should go according to our plans. We are in good company. Many of the key characters in the Bible struggle with wanting to control things in their lives.

One of those was Abraham. In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that he was going to give him his own land and many descendents that would become a great nation. We know that God kept his word and the descendents of Abraham lived in this Promised Land and became the great nation of Israel.

The problem was at the time God made the promise, Abraham and his wife Sarah were old and had no children. Abraham waited for the fulfillment of the promise that he and Sarah would have a child, but years passed and nothing happened. Abraham decided he needed to help God out. Obviously God did not understand that Sarah was beyond childbearing years. Abraham and Sarah put their own plan into motion. Abraham took Sarah's servant, Hagar, as a concubine and fathered a son with her. All this was in keeping with the societal norms of the day. But God had told Abraham that he would have a son with Sarah. Abraham did not trust God to be able to deliver on the promise so he took control of the situation. But the outcome was not good.

We are still experiencing the consequences of his need to control things today. God kept his promise and eventually Sarah became pregnant and birthed a son named Isaac. Friction developed between Sarah and Hagar. Eventually Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were forced to leave the family. Ishmael became the father of the Arab nations. Isaac became the father of the Jewish nation. Their descendents are still fighting today—over 4,000 years later!!

I wonder how many messes we have created for our families because we followed our own plans rather than God's plan? How many of our plans will negatively impact our families for generations to come?

We believe that if we are smart enough, fast enough, strong enough then we can control things—make things happen the way we want them to. But Solomon reminds us:

The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.
Ecclesiastes 9:11

No matter how strong, fast and smart we are we cannot control what happens. “Men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.” The unexpected things that happen are reminders that we are not in control.

Have you ever planned a vacation? You have your trip all mapped out—where you will stay, how long you will stay at each location and what you will do. On the second day of your trip the transmission goes out on your car. You are stranded for days as the car is repaired. The motel you are staying in was not on your list. After paying the repair bill, you have to readjust your plans. The unexpected things remind us that we are not in control.

You have plans and expectations for your child. You want him to get an education and find a meaningful career. But somewhere along the line he becomes addicted to drugs. His life is tangled with the legal system. He experiences all kinds of medical problems. His life becomes a full time fight for survival and recovery. The unexpected things remind us that we are not in control.

A little over a year ago, my sister and her husband were looking forward to retirement together. My brother-in-law took good care of himself. He ate the right

foods. He worked out. He got up one Saturday morning and played tennis for a couple of hours. He came home and was getting a drink of water in the kitchen when he collapsed from a massive heart attack. He was dead by the time he hit the floor. The unexpected things remind us that we are not in control.

When we look at the things that happen under the sun, it is easy to conclude that everything is chaos, meaningless and chasing after the wind.

“Under the sun” is the expression that Solomon uses to describe a solely human perspective. If this life is all there is, then it is meaningless. Even the wisest man who ever lived could not figure it out. Listen to the words of Solomon:

“No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.” [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#)

We are not smart enough to figure it out under the sun. We may think we know what ought to happen. But we are fooling ourselves. No matter how strong, fast or smart we are—we really cannot control anything. The unexpected happens. We grope in the darkness to make sense of things.

We need to move from an “under the sun” perspective to an “above the sun” perspective. We need to look at life from God’s perspective as revealed in his Word. Our usual strategy for dealing with the mess of life is to seek control over it. But when something happens that does not fit our plan, we begin to feel that life has no meaning.

After Abraham experienced the consequences of his need to control things, he learned another way. At first he struggled to trust God to deliver on his promise of a son. Abraham took control of the situation and forced things to happen the way he thought they should. But Abraham began to shift his point of

reference from “under the sun” to “above the sun.” Sarah gave birth to the promised son, Isaac. While he was still a young boy, God asked Abraham to do the unthinkable—take his son and offer him as a sacrifice. This is extremely hard for us to understand. How could the Creator of life ask for Abraham to sacrifice a child? Four thousand years ago, this was not an unusual request. Most of the ancient pagan religions required families to sacrifice their first born sons to the gods. Even though it was a common practice, that did not diminish the pain. We don’t know how Abraham reacted to the command to sacrifice Isaac. Was he angry? Confused? Afraid? All we know is that Abraham took Isaac up the mountain; tied him up and prepared to slay his own son. The controlling Abraham had changed. He trusted that if God took this son, he would provide another one. God had given him one son in his old age. God could do it again. Abraham no longer tried to live according to his own strength. Recognizing his weakness, Abraham grew dependent on God. He found meaning and peace not by chasing after control, but by surrendering and trusting God. Before Abraham could touch his son with the knife, God called out to him and told him not to do anything to Isaac. God provided a ram that was offered as a sacrifice in place of Isaac.

It is in the unexpected moments of life where we meet God. We feel compelled to surrender to his wisdom when the unexpected happens, and we can’t do anything about it. We are compelled to look beyond the sun for a power greater than ourselves. We are compelled to confess that all our attempts to control our lives are futile—a chasing after the wind.

Strength is found in weakness. Control is found in dependency. Power is found in surrender. As we move from control to dependence, we move from

chasing the wind under the sun to embracing God above it. Where is a place in your life today where you need to let go of control and depend upon God?