The Book that Makes Sense Backwards

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other . . . Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth? – Eccl. 3:19-21

How could a book in the Bible say that?

1. One answer focuses on the phrase “under the sun”
   “This is the book of man reasoning about life. It is the best man can do. Inspiration sets down accurately what passes. But the conclusions are man’s.”

2. A second answer focuses on Solomon’s quest

3. A third answer starts at the back of the book

The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails – given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.” – Eccl. 12:10-14

Ecclesiastes is revealed truth from a unique, eye-opening point of view. It uses shock therapy to instruct us in aspects of life and practical godliness using the testimony of a man who has been there.

I. WHAT’S THE “TRUTH” OF ECCLESIASTES?

   A. Negative Truth (12:8; 1:2)

   Life is filled with emptiness, futility, and puzzles. It can even be brutal and unkind. This life cannot be ultimately satisfying. Don’t hang your hopes on this life!

   1. Example 1: the endless routine (1:3-11)

      “According to the teacher, we are all like children playing on the seashore. We build our sandcastles and the inevitable tide washes them away. And so we do it again, only to see it washed away again. And on and on it goes until you begin to hate the process itself.” – Bruce Waltke

   2. Example 2: The utter brutality (4:1-3)

      Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. – Eccl. 4:1-3

   3. Example 3: the senseless arrangement (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. Moreover, 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. – Eccl. 9:11-12

   B. Positive Truth (3:10-14)

      I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than
to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God . . . God does it so that men will revere him. – Eccl. 3:10-14

II. What Can We Learn That Helps Us Live Upright Lives?

A. Be Generous (11:1-6)

B. Be Joyful (11:7-8b, 9a, 10)

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun — all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might – Eccl. 9:7-10

C. Be Godly (12:13)

D. Be Dependent on Christ

CONCLUSION

How do we live by faith in a soap bubble world, where everywhere we look there are riddles, and puzzles, and confusion?

God doesn’t give us a key to figure life out. He only offers himself. Trust him and you’ll begin to taste how good life can be. Refuse him and whatever path you take will turn into a dead end street.

I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,