Ecclesiastes Week 3: The Preacher helps us address the nonbeliever

1. **Review and Intro**
    - The believer should read Ecclesiastes like Job rather than Proverbs[1]
        - **i.** It is a call for the believer not to approach life with The Preacher's outlook. Rather, you should trust God instead of your observations and feelings.
    - The opening song, "Hard Times[2]", convinced me to study Ecclesiastes
        - **i.** We should guard against The Preacher's way of thinking
        - **ii.** We should also be moved to compassion for those trapped in it and call them to repent and believe the Gospel

2. **The meaninglessness of fame/wealth/pleasure (Chapter 2:1-11)**
    - The Preacher tests himself with pleasure, guided by "wisdom" to lay hold of folly (2:1-3)
        - **i.** This introduces the concept of a "gap," or an idea held in tension[3]
        - **ii.** How do you lay hold of "folly" while guided by "wisdom?"
        - **iii.** Worldly wisdom—life is short, get what you can[4]
    - Pleasure did not slow down The Preacher's attempt at other forms of greatness (2:4-11)
        - **i.** It is possible that he was trying to re-create Eden and therefore play God or be his own god[5]
        - **ii.** He enjoyed it for a time, but in the end found it to be vanity (3:11)
    - Do we see this struggle in our modern culture?
        - **i.** Consider the words of Mandy Moore
            - "Candy"[6] vs. "Fifteen"[7]
            - What was the fruit of fame early in life? A feeling of missing something and a grasping for meaning

3. **An idea in tension—enjoy life because you're going to die (Chapter 9:1-10)**
    - The Preacher observes the fate of all (even the good)…death
    - In this light, life itself is madness (9:3); there can be no joy when considering the certainty of death[8]
    - Even so, The Preacher says to enjoy life (9:7-10)
        - **i.** This sets up an "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" attitude
        - **ii.** This isn't presented as a solution, but as another gap[9]
        - **iii.** Enjoyment of this world is no resolution or ultimate solution to death. The Preacher sees this tension[10] since death is a real end for him[11]
    - Do we see this struggle in our culture?
        - **i.** Consider "Ants Marching[12]" by The Dave Matthews Band
            - Contrast the tone and tempo of the music with the lyrics
        - **ii.** Consider also "Hard Times" by Paramore

- Contrast the musical feel with the lyrics and images in the music video

4. **A summary of the unbeliever's perspective**
   - The Preacher presents life as enigmatic at best, meaningless at worst
     - **i.** Pleasure, fame, money, and power end in emptiness
     - **ii.** Worldly wisdom is no guide to answers in this life
   - Attempts to resolve the enigma or assign meaning to apparent meaninglessness lead to nihilism and despair[13]
   - The Preacher captures the despair of a world without God[14]
   - Consider one last example: Christopher Hitchens
     - **i.** One of the "Four Horseman[15]" of the "New Atheist" movement
     - **ii.** Author of books like, *God is Not Great*, and articles such as "The New Ten Commandments."
     - **iii.** This champion of the world's wisdom died in 2011 but wrestled with the "meaning of it all" before his death.
       - Consider an article written in May 2011[16] where Hitchens looks for "hope" and apparent meaning
       - Consider Hitchens' friendship with apologist Larry Taunton who shared the Gospel with him before his death
     - **iv.** Even the "brave" atheist looked for meaning at the end and found nothing but hopelessness

5. **As the church, we must respond with the Gospel**
   - Rather than scorn or pride, this should move us to compassion for the unbeliever and move us to present the Gospel
   - Ecclesiastes 3:11
     - **i.** You know that Eternity is real…that's why you search for meaning
   - Romans 1:18-20
     - **i.** You know there is a God, but you suppress the truth
     - **ii.** Therefore, the wrath of God is upon you
   - Matthew 5:48—God is perfect, and He measures by that standard
   - Psalm 130:3-4—We cannot stand before the Holy God, but He forgives
   - 1 Corinthians 15:20-22—Christ was raised from the dead to make sinners alive
   - Romans 7:24-8:3—Christ rescues us from our body of sin and death
   - 1 John 3:19-20—Feel bad about sin? God is greater than our feelings
   - 1 Peter 1:3-5—You previously had no hope, now you have a living hope in Jesus Christ.

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[1] *The book of Ecclesiastes*. Tremper Longman III; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing; Grand Rapids, MI; p 38.

[2] "Hard Times," Haley Williams and Taylor York; *After Laughter*, Atlantic Recording Corporation, 2017.

[3] *Ecclesiastes*, Craig G. Bartholomew; Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 2009: p 131.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p 133

[6] "Candy," David Rice and Mark Stevens; *So Real*, Sony Music Entertainment, 1999.

[7] "Fifteen," Jason Boesel, Taylor Goldsmith, Mandy Moore, and Mike Viola; *Silver Landings*, UMG Recordings, 2020
[8] Bartholomew, p 302-303.
[9] Ibid., p 305.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Longman, p 231.
[12] "Ants Marching," Dave Matthews; *Under the Table and Dreaming*, Bama Rags Recordings, 1994.
[13] Bartholomew, p 252.
[14] Longman, p 40.
[15] The "Four Horsemen" refers to Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. A conversation they had about atheism which is preserved in a book entitled, *The Four Horsemen, the Conversation that Sparked an Atheist Revolution*.
[16] "Unspoken Truths," Christopher Hitchens; Vanity Fair Magazine, June 2011; https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/06/christopher-hitchens-unspoken-truths-201106