

# Ecclesiastes and the Feast of Tabernacles' Symbolism

Eric V. Snow, sermonette, 9-12-09, Ann Arbor, MI, UCG-IA

Last month in Jackson I went to the reunion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my high school's graduating class. This anniversary marks a major milestone in life. It should make people reflect seriously on what they've done in life and what they still wish to do. We were all likely at or past the halfway point of our physical lives. Most likely all the women who graduated the same year I did, 1984, who haven't had a baby yet, will never have one, unless they get artificial medical help. The door for beginning motherhood is almost totally closed for them. Now, the Feast of Tabernacles is coming soon. So why should I mention my high school reunion today? To reflect on it and the symbolism of the Feast should remind us that this life isn't very important except for how it prepares us for the next life. Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes,

teaches us how futile life's activities are apart from God's purpose for us.

**S.P.S. So today, I'll show that Ecclesiastes teaches us that this life's achievements and activities by themselves aren't of permanent value, just like the Feast of Tabernacles does.**

Jews during the Feast of Tabernacles traditionally read this book. That can't be seen as a coincidence. One reason they gave for this custom was that Solomon wrote this book in the autumn of his life, near its end. That's when the Feast occurs. Winter then would symbolize death when most plants have died or stop growing.

**Solomon points out three things that ultimately don't have value by themselves because we all will die: 1. To gain wisdom and knowledge. 2. To get pleasure and enjoyment. 3. To achieve goals at work. So I'll work through each of these points today.**

## **1. To get wisdom and knowledge is ultimately futile since wise men die also.**

Eccl. 1:12+

It's not always a pleasure to seek wisdom and knowledge, since it brings pain.

Example: Article in "The Economist" about how common malnutrition among poor Indians in Guatemala. Can't fix this problem ourselves, need to wait for God's kingdom, although Christians should help the poor. In general, most news is bad news. That becomes depressing when hearing or reading a lot of it.

## **2. To get pleasure is ultimately futile also.**

Eccl. 2:1+

The purpose of life isn't to maximize pleasure and minimize pain: Hedonism. What good does it do long term? Young

people especially should think about this point.

Eccl. 2:3

Solomon didn't know the real purpose of life. We know more than he did, the wisest man who ever lived.

What is the purpose of life? The purpose of life is to gain actual holy righteous character as the Holy Spirit helps us. That's the one thing we can take from this life. Then we're becoming more like God by having both the habits of obedience and the free will. But we can't take with us fame or fortune, houses or cars, to the kingdom.

**3. Achievements at work ultimately are inherited by others, are forgotten, or turn to dust.**

Eccl. 2:4+

V. 10: He rejoiced in his labor, but . . .

V. 11: He realized how futile all those achievements were.

This is a warning to all workaholics determined to build businesses and/or climb the corporate ladder. Even if you succeed financially, how important will that be when you're on your deathbed at age 80?

V. 14, 16: Everyone will die, which makes these accomplishments futile.

Political debates with two guys in high school English class: liberal, conservative, libertarian. Both of my opponents now have Ph.D.'s and teach at universities. Impressive! But neither knows God's truth, and one told me he doesn't believe in God.

Work is good, but how does the work shaper the worker? That's what matters most in God's sight. Everything else built is like a giant sandcastle. It ultimately gets washed away by the sea. Example of Chan-Chan in Peru, built by Chimu

civilization that the Incan empire conquered. Huge palaces, I visited one while I was there, mud bricks now mostly turned back to dirt. They are doing restoration and excavating work.

V. 17: Again, Solomon didn't know the ultimate purpose of life.

V. 18: A fool could inherit the property of the wise man. So was all of Solomon's work useless and done in vain?

Key question in life: Are we living our lives in vain? Often asked of soldiers: Did they die in vain, or uselessly? Were they on the wrong side in war? Did their leaders get them killed uselessly in battle? But this question we should direct at ourselves also.

Tell story about throwing a frozen, dead squirrel into a trash can at my mother's home years ago: I thought, except that God cares, my life doesn't matter any more than this squirrel's.

Our basic “existential” dilemma: We’re alive, but know we will die. So what will we do about it? Is there a way to escape death and to live forever? If so, how? Christ provided the way, but there ARE conditions involved. We should prepare now for the next life, and not assume that we’ll get there automatically.

[Optional text: Hebrews 11:24-27]

**Conclusion: So in conclusion,** as we prepare to go the Feast of Tabernacles, let’s remember what Solomon taught us about how this physical life lacks meaning by itself. To gain knowledge and wisdom, to experience pleasure, and to achieve at work, aren’t of lasting value by themselves. So may we live our lives with true purpose, and not uselessly in vain.