

SERMON OUTLINE

Speaker: Dr Philip Satterthwaite

Text : Ecclesiastes 1 : 1 - 11

Title : Life 'Under The Sun'

Introduction

History: just one thing after another?

1. The Teacher's View of the World (1:1-11)

- Generation after generation: what difference does it all make? (vv. 3-4)
- The endless cycles of nature (vv. 5-8)
- Nothing will change this (vv. 9-10)
- Each generation will in time be forgotten (v. 11)
- That's how God has made the world (v. 13)

2. The Translation of a Key Term (*hevel*)

- Key terms in Ecclesiastes: 'under the sun', 'toil', 'chasing after the wind', etc.
- The most important key term: *hevel*.
- 'Vanity' (KJV, NRSV)? No: a bit archaic.
- 'Meaningless' (NIV)? No: an over-translation influenced by existentialism.
- *hevel* = 'breath', 'vapour'
- In OT *hevel* refers to what is fruitless (Ps. 78:33), fleeting (Pr. 31:30), pointless (Pr. 21:6); also to idols (Jer. 2:5)
- In Ecclesiastes: (i) futile (2:11); (ii) incomprehensible (8:14); (iii) brief (11:10)
- Best translate 'breath', 'vapour'; or 'enigma'

3. What Do We Do with Ecclesiastes?

- King Solomon's shocking statement: 'Everything is a breath!'
- Christian attempts to domesticate Ecclesiastes
- The Teacher does 'try ideas on': you mustn't take everything at face value
- He sometimes presents one side of an argument, then the other (e.g., 3:16-4:8)
- But the teaching is often very true to life
- The words of the wise are 'goads' (12:11) – and we should let ourselves be goaded!
- The Teacher is in the end a believer: he urges us to fear God (12:13)

Conclusion

As we study Ecclesiastes, let us aim to take God's word seriously.