

The Summer Soul
Part 2
7-16-17
Ecclesiastes (selected)



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“Where in your life do you seem to be experiencing God’s favor? How might you use this opportunity to deepen gratitude and generosity, rather than simply revel in your abundance?”

“What about your life do you currently consider to be favorable? What things seem adverse? Might it be too early to tell?”

“How is life wearying you? On what are you willing to weary yourself? Are you tired in doing good, or simply tired of doing good? (Galatians 6:9)

“Is it possible that the joy that God longs to give you can be found in the context of the life that you are currently experiencing-- in the very circumstances that you are asking him to eliminate? Is it possible that the joy available to you is in the power of the commitments that you make in midst of the difficult marriage, the demanding children, the thankless job, and the aging parents?”

“Is there actually rest to be found in confession? Is there rest in redemption? What if you believed that you belonged, no matter what you chose to disclose about yourself? Which would you say is currently more influential in your life: your need for acceptance or your desire for transparency? What if you were able to find both in a Christ-centered, healing community?”

Teaching Notes...

I said last week that “life is seasonal”. Some seem brutally long. Some seem to pass too quickly. Some we anticipate. Some we endure. All are necessary. None of them last forever.

There are some activities which prove to be totally unproductive and completely futile, given the season. So, it would seem that the challenge of any given season/occasion is to recognize it (understand the signs) and discern the appropriate response.

The fullness of Jewish wisdom cannot be contained in the pithy, response/outcome formulas of Proverbs, alone. Each offering has a “piece” of wisdom which cannot be defined or fully understood apart from the others. How do we reconcile the proverbial, *“Train up a child, ...”* (22:6), when you have raised a prodigal. What about the time that you acted justly at work and got fired for it? What about when you begin to experience abuse from the very spouse you were certain God told you to marry? Proverbs must be read in cooperation with Ecclesiastes and Job.

Proverbs: lady wisdom; ancient; tested and proven; obedient.

Job: experienced; honest; humbled. *"I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said"* (42:5-6) Never mind!

Ecclesiastes: adventuresome; pre-occupied; harried; cynical; depressed... **Seattle.**

"hebel"- (Heb) *vapor; breath; vanity; meaningless* (seems to lack substance)

James 4:14 *"morning fog"*: here for a little while, then it's gone.

Vapor appears to be substantial, but when you reach out for it--- as you attempt to hold it--- it dissipates. There are things that seem 'solid', which seem worth our investment, only to realize their volatility.

Hebel is, in our vernacular, "absurd". As "meaning-seeking creatures", nothing seems to create such anxiety for us as 'hebel': that which doesn't seem to make sense.

Wisdom never seems to guarantee that we will find meaning in the circumstance, but invites us to make the situation meaningful, by our response.

Interestingly, in the context of all of the activity surrounding Jesus' final moments with his followers, both John and Matthew have him taking the disciples, not to the Temple to hone their skills at executing ritual, but to the garden to teach them about being "fruitful".

Summer...

The pace of growth slows. It's a time of **maturity and development**. The activity seems more routine. We realize that not much can be done now to increase the crop, but it's no time for passivity.

Summer of the soul...

It's a time when the rapid growth and excitement of Spring gives way to patient-resilience. The environment seems harsher: heat intensifies, the days get longer, the ground is drier, the insects multiply more rapidly. The conditions don't seem conducive to growth.

The same environment which helps promote the maturity of the fruit, also threatens its viability.

I think perseverance (Latin root translated, *"by means of the truth"*) is the most **"under-rated"** aspect of our faith. Most simply, perseverance is knowing when not to quit. It's walking out on God just as he was about to do the 'encore'.

During the Summer of the soul, we become even more dependent upon the nourishment that the vine offers. Our "remaining" suggests that we lack the necessary resources, apart from Jesus (John 15).

As the intensity dries out the soil, the roots are drawn downward--- deeper--- to where the moisture remains. God is requiring us to draw even more deeply from his life and love.

I think wisdom would say...

Don't weary yourself on the wrong things.

Isaiah 43:22 *"Yet you have not called on me, Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, Israel."*

The invitation is for the people to respond to the God who lovingly created, rescued, and provided for them, but they were committed to their own self-preservation. In the process, they not only exhausted themselves, but God, as well.

Neither be a hedonist, nor a nihilist. Someone who thinks that life is “living for the moment” or someone who can’t “enjoy the moment”.

Assume that life with Jesus is ultimately rewarding, but not that the life of ease or comfort is God’s reward to you for your good behavior.

Pay attention to what you desire. The only thing worse than the frustration of not getting what you presently desire, is getting what you desire and not being fulfilled. Hebel [*We will always find what we seek because we always seek what we desire. Know your desires.*]

suffering--perseverance--character--hope [Romans 5]

It’s the journey from “disappointment” to “hope”: the place where our demands for comfort surrender to the settled-confidence in one thing: *“the love of Christ poured into our hearts”* (Romans 5).

When the adversity of the situation seems to invite confusion and anxiety in those closest to me, my only recourse is to reinforce my love for them. I keep saying, *“I know it hurts, honey, but I love you”*. It has no immediate effect on the circumstance, but it proves ‘sustaining’ because of its rugged commitment to be “with” us in the hebel. It says, *“I’m not going anywhere. I’m in this with you.”*

It doesn’t matter what your pain threshold, if you don’t believe that God is good, your endurance will result, not in joy, but in resentment and bitterness.

I have noticed that each time one of the biblical characters responded in obedience, even in the absence of clarity, they affirmed God’s credibility and validated their own trust. Their obedience was not a blind leap-of-faith, but a courageous choice for the goodness of God, which resulted in *“calm delight”*... joy.

Joy is neither a ‘white-knuckled’ determination or a ‘smiley face emoji’. It’s “calm delight” which has outlasted your adversity without abandoning God, in the process.

Summer always starts to reveal what has been planted. The fruit is already starting to manifest itself. I realize that there’s an ominous finality to that statement.

Prayer is the response of those suffering from senseless hardship. Confession is the response of those suffering senselessly (James 5).

Confession is the gift that God gives us because of our inability to receive grace. It’s a way to be honest without all of the “self-loathing”.

When the truth of the situation exposes our brokenness, grace will always be there to take a moment, ripe for condemnation, and utilize it as a means of securing us in love.

Here’s my hope: There will never be a circumstance in my life, whether self-inflicted or unexplainable, which God cannot “reclaim” (restore) and use to accomplish something of greater value. Sovereignty simply allows God to get creative with grace!