

“This is my Father’s [Crooked] World”

It was the German Reformer, Martin Luther who introduced us to the language of “God’s Devil.” Luther did not mean by this that God and the devil were friends or partners. He was emphasising the fact that even the devil, as God’s arch enemy, remains under God’s sovereign control.

In a similar manner, in Ecclesiastes, as Solomon developed the theme of the absolute vanity of life under the sun, he weaves through it a strong emphasis on

the sovereignty of God. It is God, he says, who has given us this “unhappy business” of life under the sun (1:13, 3:10; 4:8), all of it, good and bad, is the “work of God” (7:13; 8:17; 11:5), from “the hand of God” (2:24; 9:1 see also 5:18-19; 8:15; Job 2:10). The God who gives, also withholds (6:2) and what he does is an enigma to us (3:11; 11:5).

But where did Solomon get such a solid grasp of the sovereignty of God?

Well, much of the book draws from personal experience. Solomon evidently recognised God by faith in the events and circumstances around him. He was a thinking man (1:13,17; 2:12). But more fundamentally, Solomon’s worldview was soundly rooted in Scripture. Three threads of thought run through the book that take us directly back to Genesis 3:17-19 where God explained to Adam

what the fallen world would look like. Ecclesiastes, we might say, is Solomon's commentary on Genesis 3:17-19.

First, the world is crooked

The word "crooked" that is used in the first chapter (1:15) and later in the book (7:13) is translated in Psalm 146:9 as "ruined" (ESV) or "turned upside down" (KJV). in Job 19:6, it is translated "overthrown" (KJV). Solomon used the same word to speak of the old man "bowed down" (12:3). Solomon makes the point that God has done this (7:13). The world is "bowed down," groaning, to use Paul's word (Romans 8:22), under the hand of God, waiting for the fulness of redemption in the coming of the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 1:7)

Second, life is difficult

God told Adam that life would consist of "thorns and thistles," and "the sweat of

your face.” Similarly, Solomon used the word labour/toil over 20 times. Life under the sun is characterised by toil and labour, and ironically it is manifest most clearly among the more prosperous (2:18-26). There is no escape from the difficulties. Life is an uphill climb, a struggle, weariness of the flesh (12:12). In short, life is an “unhappy business” (1:13, 3:10; 4:8 see also Job 14:1).

Third, death is inevitable

God told Adam that his life of difficulty would culminate in the dust (Genesis 3:20), and Solomon highlights this thought through Ecclesiastes (1:4; 9:4-6; 12:7). Even if a person lives many years (11:8), the body, as Solomon so vividly describes, is in a state of decline and decay and death will come as the necessary end (12:1-7).

The theme of vanity is so prominent in Ecclesiastes, that many fail to see how Solomon finds hope in this weary world. But Solomon has woven hope throughout the book in continual references to God, for it is only by tracing everything back to our Creator that can we understand, accept, endure and find hope, as Paul tells us also (Romans 8:20).

Solomon's response was the same response as Adam in the garden. It was hope in promise of the living God (Genesis 3:15) that enabled Adam to rename his wife "Eve," (i.e. "the mother of all life" Genesis 3:20).

God has created a sense of eternity in the human soul (3:11), a knowledge that we will go to our "eternal home" (12:5) for the spirit goes back to the Creator, the "God who gave it" (12:7). The best

thing, the wisest and safest thing to do--the gospel, if you will--is to "remember" the creator in his crooked world (12:1), to "fear him" (5:7) and to show our faith in God by keeping his commandments (12:13, see also James 2:14-26).