**Pastor Tim’s Sermon from November 15, 2020
Title: Several Dead Ends and One Strong Foundation**

This past Sunday my family met up with my sister’s family at a place called Maize Quest. Have any of you ever done a corn maze? It’s kind of become a tradition for our families over the last several years to meet up and to this together.

Our youngest daughter, Mya, wasn’t really interested in going in the big corn maze and she chose to stay with Kara and play some other things there. There was a big slide and a train that she enjoyed riding in.

Our other daughters wanted to do this adventure without any adults. So that left my sister Kimberly, my brother-in-law Matt, and myself attempting to make our way through the maze.

The funny thing was that the kids beat us by a lot. It took them about an hour to get through. We were pushing 2 hours. And honestly, we spotted a woman who was walking with such confidence that we decided to follow her. Eventually we told her that we were following her and would appreciate any help finding our way getting out. We didn’t want to creep her out.

And she gladly told us what we needed to do to find our way out.

\*This experience trying to navigate a giant maze can feel a little bit like our quest to find significance with our lives.

People can attempt to find meaning and purpose in all different things. But just like Kimberly, Matt, and I experienced at Maize Quest, most of those paths lead to dead ends.

Do you know that God inspired a book in the Bible to be all about this quest for meaning and significance in life? It is a powerful book called Ecclesiastes.

This book was written by King Solomon and it describes his quest for meaning and significance and purpose in life. Solomon was king of Israel. And Israel was at its peak strength during his reign. His father David had fought and won many victories before him.

This morning and for the next 2 weeks as well, we will take a closer look at this great book and the keys that God gives us on finding purpose or meaning on the quest that we call life.

\*But before diving into this book this morning, I would like to address a couple of things about this book with you.

**First**, I have learned from my professors that this book is probably the most misunderstood book in the Bible.

Now why is it misunderstood?

It is misunderstood because it has been poorly translated. It appears that the translators of all the English versions of our Bibles, believed that this book was mostly negative, that it was a downer.

And so, some of the Hebrew words are translated into English with words that convey a more negative tone, a more negative way.

**But this could not be further from the truth. This book is meant to be a very positive book that reveals God’s perspective on how life should be lived**. This book is just as much inspired as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and it is an important gift that we have from God.

One example of this misunderstanding is related to the Hebrew word “**Hevel**” --- which is often translated as meaningless or vein.

But is Solomon really saying that life is meaningless? A better translation for “hevel” is transient.

Life is ever changing. It is here today and gone tomorrow. It is life a wisp of the wind. Yes, we have eternal life in Jesus Christ, but this life as we know it is transient, it goes quickly.

But just b/c life is ever changing and quickly passing, does not make life meaningless. Solomon does not want to tell us that life is meaningless, but he wants to instruct us on how God wants us to live our lives as they quickly progress. This is so important!

**The second point** that I would like to address is who the audience was intended to be. Solomon wrote this book with youth in mind.

In 11:9a, he writes, “**You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth**.”

And a couple of verses later, Solomon writes in 12:1a “**Remember your Creator in the days of your youth**”

Why would Solomon’s as well as God’s target audience be youth? Because they want us to grasp God’s perspective on how we should live while we are still young. God wants us to not get stuck in dead ends for long periods of time, like Kimberly and Matt and I were last Sunday.

But certainly, this message of this book is for everyone. Perhaps we can equate it to that confident woman who kindly led us away from our dead ends and joyfully on the right path forward.

With those things being said, this book includes Solomon’s quest to discover how life should be lived. And He invites us in to this quest to experience his journey with him.

As we take a closer look at these attempts from Solomon, may we remember his words for us today that there is nothing new under the sun. These views on how life should be lived are still held today and they still continue to disappoint.

As we consider these attempts from Solomon, please remember that many of these things are good things, but the purpose of our lives cannot be found in any of these.

**1st Attempt: The Learner!** – discover all there is to know. The big problem with that is that we can’t. We cannot know all things. We are not God. (1:12-18).

The Result: Disappointment: it is an impossible task (“what is lacking cannot be counted”). This effort is like “chasing wind – it is endless and fruitless.

It is important to note that God is not against us learning and gaining knowledge. But we cannot know it all, no matter how much we learn. In fact, the word disciple means ‘learner.’ So Christ expects His followers to be learners.

But learning is not an end in and of itself. Scripture says that there are some that are ever-learning and never understanding. It is possible to learn a whole not, but not know God, the One who gives us the ability to learn in the first place.

Quick show of hands. Have you ever studied something and feel like you have a pretty good grasp on it and then you meet someone that knows much more than you do?

The more that I learn, the more that I realize that I do not know many things.

God wants us to be life-long learners, but learning in and of itself does not help us grasp the meaning of our fleeting lives.

**2nd attempt – The Party Animal!**

Just live it up. Is life meant to be viewed as a playground or as an amusement park?

Result: Disappointment: fun and laughter in and of themselves provide no meaning in life. Again, God is not against joy or fun. In fact, in His presence is fullness of joy.

But living just to experience as much fun as possible still leads someone empty inside.

For after it is all over, nothing has been gained.

**3rd attempt: The Alcoholic**

Escape the pain with wine (2:3)

Disappointment: the nagging question of the meaning of life cannot be silenced

(other additions fit it here --- getting high, getting drunk ---- trying to escape reality) --- it doesn’t work

**4th Attempt: The Workaholic**

Accomplish much and become wealthy, filling your life with pleasures (2:4-11)

Result: Disappointment: one’s accomplishments and wealth, while enjoyable, fail to provide lasting meaning or significance to life.

(workaholism, like alcoholism – is really trying to cover up some deep inner pains through one’s efforts)

**5th Attempt: The Moral Superstar**

Result: Disappointment: wise living, though of some value, fails to provide life with any lasting meaning or significance; The lives of both the wise and the foolish are fleeting, transient.

(While we are called to be moral, it should not be an end in and of itself.)

People can be very moral and yet not know God.

The Pharisees sought to live very moral and yet they largely rejected Jesus.

**6th Attempt: The Philanthropist**

Accomplish and acquire much as a legacy for future generations (2:17-23)

Result: Disappointment: who knows what the next generation, or future generations, will do with one’s accomplishments or gifts? Others in the future may ever use one’s gifts and legacy for folly or evil.

Again, all of these things are not bad in themselves. But is not against work. But He doesn’t want us to be alcoholics. And God is not against alcohol either. But He’s against drunkenness with wine and beer and other substances.

So, what is the answer?

Solomon gives us a huge clue in chapter 5, verses 1-7

**Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**

“Be careful when you come to God’s temple; obedience is better than the sacrifices offered by fools. Fools are experts in wrongdoing. Do not be like them; do not be glib in what you say to God, or hasty in what you promise. Remember, God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. The fool comes with much fanfare, making insincere promises with many words. But when you make a vow to God, do not delay in keeping it. God is not pleased with fools; so fulfill your vows. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not keep it. Do not let your mouth get you into trouble; do not try to tell God that you didn’t intend to make the vow. Why should God be angered at what you say and take away what you have achieved? So avoid empty promises and long, insincere speeches. Instead, **respect God and submit to his authority.”**

I believe that we can summarize his answer in the phrase - **Stand in awe of God!** (many translations say “fear God”). The emphasis is more on standing in awe of God and seeking to honor Him in all things, rather than simply being afraid of God.

To fear God or stand in awe of God, means that we respect God and to submit to His authority is central to discovering and living out lives purpose.

We are created by God, therefore He is worthy of our deepest respect.

**\*\*We are able to enjoy fellowship with our Triune God as we stand in awe of Him each day.**

We are to stand in awe of God and to respect Him. We demonstrate this by submitting to Him authority over our life.

In Proverbs we learn that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Why should we stand in awe of God?

**First** - Because He is our Creator.

**Second** – Because even though we do not understand how everything fits together in life, we are to trust that our Maker does and that He loves us and wants our good in the midst of whatever happens to us in life.

**Third** – Because God is a righteous and good judge and He will judge each of us.

**Fourth** – Because God will ultimately right every wrong that exists in the world.

B/c He is worthy of our trust in all of these ways ----- we are to stand in awe of Him!

So friends, let us stand in awe of our wonderful and good God. May we enjoy our fellowship with Him each and every day. And may we make growing in our walk with Him the most important thing in our life.

When this is our foundation, instead of getting lost easily, it becomes difficult for us to take wrong turns in life.

God is our path. Let us stand in awe of Jesus as we follow after Him.

And friends, over the next two weeks we will consider two other keys to a very meaningful life that Solomon gives us. But the first key is to stand in awe of our great God.

Let’s pray…