

THE STORYCHANGER

ECCLESIASTES 2:17-26

OUR MESSY AND MEANINGLESS STORIES

What's your story?



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

How is your story going? Your life story? Is it a happy story or a sad story? Is it going according to plan or is it out of control? Is your story going forwards, backwards, or around in circles? Is your story exciting or boring? Are you proud of your story or ashamed of it? Will your story have a happy ending or a sad one?

Originally, at the beginning of world history, God made humanity to have good, meaningful, purposeful stories with happy endings. But sin spilt ink all over the pages, and now no story lives up to that. Instead, our stories are messy and meaningless. Our stories have sad chapters, boring chapters, depressing chapters, and embarrassing chapters. Sometimes we want to rip chapters out of our story. Other times, we wish we could start our story all over again. We fear a bad and sad ending.

Can we change our story so that the next chapters of our life are happier, more significant, and impactful? Is it possible to have a 'happy-ever-after' ending?

To change our story, we need the Story-Changer, Jesus Christ, who changes our story with his Story. *The Story-Changer: Changing our story with God's Story* is our new Sunday morning sermon series. In it, we will meet Jesus, the Story-Changer who changes our stories with his Story. This, in turn, changes hearers of God's story into tellers of God's story, so that we become not only story-hearers but story-tellers and, therefore, also story-changers.

We'll begin the series with a look at our messy and meaningless stories. Why? Because we won't need or want to meet the StoryChanger until we recognize that our stories need changed.

CONTEXT

In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon shares his story with us. It was a mixed story, as we know. When he lived for God, his story was so good. When he left God out, his story went from bad to worse. We get both sides of his story in Ecclesiastes.

Thirty times, he describes the person living life 'under the sun.' That was Solomon in his godless years, when all he saw was the present and this world, and he lost sight of the eternal and the heavenly. Pessimism and skepticism are dominant in these sections. However, in thirteen other sections, Solomon brings God into the story, he lives 'above the sun,' and this changes the mood to one of certainty, joy, and hope (eg. 2:24-26; 3:14).

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 begins with a godless life 'under the sun,' but ends up with a God-centered life 'above the sun.'



Does my story need changed?



1. OUR STORIES NEED CHANGED

Our stories are sad

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me (17).

Wherever he looked, Solomon saw sadness. Whatever he tried, he was sad. Chapter 1:1-2:16 details his pursuit of pleasure. After an introduction about the general futility of life without God (1:1-11), Solomon narrates how he engaged in an unsuccessful search for satisfaction in education (1:12-18), pleasure (2:1-3), success (2:4-17), and work (2:18-23). His verdict on it all? Hatred of life because of the sadness of life. He tried everything and yet the end result was a life of quiet desperation.

Our stories are short

For all is vanity (17).

This word 'vanity' occurs 38 times in this book (e.g. 1:2, 20; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26). The word means 'something short, transitory, short-lived.' It's used for a breeze, breath, or vapor. It's also the name Adam and Eve gave to their second son, Abel. 'Vanity of vanities' is a Hebrew way of expressing a superlative. For example, 'Song of Songs' means 'the best song,' and 'Holy of Holies' means 'the most holy.' So, 'vanity of vanities' means the briefest, shortest.

Our stories are senseless

For all is vanity and a striving after wind. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity...This also is vanity and a great evil (17-19).

What's really bugging him here is that fact that everything he's worked for will eventually be left to someone else he doesn't know, someone of unknown character who will probably fritter it all away without a thought for who earned it in the first place.

What's the point in that? he asks. It's as senseless as trying to catch the wind. He despairs because there's no meaning. His heart despairs because nothing makes any sense to him (20). He has little if anything to show for his life of toil and striving under the sun. Is this it? No wonder he hates life under the sun. It's just senseless drudgery.



Our stories are stressful

For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity (23).

Work takes a toll on the body and the soul. He's depressed and distressed. He's weary but cannot sleep because of the stress. If you want to hate life, live it without looking beyond it

APPLICATION

"My story is sad." Does Solomon's story sound like your story? Sad? Short? Senseless? Stressful? Can you identify with it? I'm so sorry if that's the case. But I want to offer you hope. If, like Solomon, you confess to God that your story isn't turning out as you hoped, there is hope for you. Bring your story to God and say, "My story is not going well. It's sad, short, senseless, stressful. Please change my story, StoryChanger."

"My story will work out." Maybe you are young and you think, "I'll be more successful than Solomon. I'm going to live life 'under the sun' but I will be happy. I'll make it work." Don't waste your life. No one else has succeeded at this. Why do you think you will be the exception? Hand your pen to God early in life. Don't give him just the last chapter. He can write a far better life-story for you than you can.

IF YOU WRITE YOUR OWN STORY
YOU'LL WRITE OFF YOUR WHOLE STORY.



How can God change our stories?



2. GOD CHANGES OUR STORY

How would you like a story that is happy instead of sad, endless instead of short, meaningful instead of meaningless, peaceful instead of stressful? The only way is to get above the sun, to get above the horizon of this world, to bring God into our stories, to put God at the center of our stories. God can change our stories with his story. Solomon had been searching for the 'good' life. But in verses 24-26, 'good' appears four times because God is in the picture.

God writes a happy story

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God (24).

After verse after verse of misery, joy at last appears in verse 24. It appears again in verses 25&26. What made the difference? What changed this story from a sad one to a happy one? **God.** God's name has only been mentioned once up to this point, but from 2-24-3:15, his name appears repeatedly. Solomon was no longer viewing life from a human-centered perspective but from God's viewpoint. **For apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (25).**

God writes a meaningful story

This also, I saw, is from the hand of God (24).

What made Solomon so happy? Did his life change? No. It was still eating, drinking, working; eating, drinking, working. What changed was that he connected God with everything. He traced everything to God's hand. He saw divine significance in the everyday and the mundane. He saw God in everything. He was eating the same meal, drinking the same drink, doing the same work as the unbeliever, but he now found enormous joy in seeing God in the small things. By connecting everything to God, everything took on a whole new meaning.

God writes a grace story

This also, I saw, is from the hand of God (24).

He didn't just see God in everything, he saw God had given him everything. He had not earned it, but rather had been gifted it by God. It was no longer what he achieved, but what he received. We don't have the power to give ourselves happiness. It is something given by God in God. Solomon took nothing for granted but everything as gifted: food, water, appetite, digestion, sight, hearing, smell, memory, health, sanity. Grace was so wonderfully satisfying. It wasn't just material things that got better by grace; intellectual and spiritual things got better too. **For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy (26).** Previously, his pursuit of wisdom and knowledge ended in grief and sorrow. But when God gives it, he gives it together with joy. All things are new. There's a new contentment and satisfaction. Heaven begins on earth.



APPLICATION

Give God your book and your pen. Hand it over to him and ask him to become your StoryChanger. Live a God-centered life for a satisfying life. Christ is the one who modeled this God-centered life perfectly. He is the fulfillment of this text. “I am come that they might have life that that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). By faith, we hand over our pen to the world’s best-selling author, Jesus Christ, and ask him to re-write our story using his Story.

I like my story so far. You say, “I don’t need God to write my story. I’m doing a perfectly good job myself.” It may be that your godless story so far has been better than most, but have you seen the ending? **But to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind** (26). You worked to accumulate but you will leave empty, whereas the ones who lived for God will inherit riches. Your epitaph will be “This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

DO YOU WANT A HAPPY-EVER-AFTER ENDING
OR A HELL-EVER-AFTER UNENDING?



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: StoryChanger, I confess my story is messy and meaningless. I hand my story over to you. Please change it with your Story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your story so far? What parts are you pleased with? What parts would you like to change?
2. What would you say to someone who told you, "I hate life"?
3. What makes you hate life?
4. How has God changed your story so far?
5. How can you find more joy and satisfaction in everyday life?
6. How can you increase your capacity and appreciation for God's mercy?

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