

Preaching Jesus from Ecclesiastes

1. Basic Principles

Hebrews is the premier homiletics textbook for how to preach Jesus from the Bible “The author identifies his work as a ‘word of exhortation’ (13:22). The careful rhetorical progression of the book, along with its frequent practical exhortations, has led many to consider it a single sermon. Perhaps Hebrews is best understood as a sermon letter.”¹

<p>[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb. 1:1-2)</p>	<p>The Big Story: Locate this Biblical text within redemptive history.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • past (long ago, created the world, prophets) • present (in these last days) • future (heir of all things) <p>first words in the Bible, last words in the Bible New Testament comment? Biblical thread/theme?</p>
<p>[3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power . . . [8] But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” (Heb. 1:3, 8-9)</p>	<p>Imprint of God’s Character and Way: Jesus said, to Philip, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn.14:9).</p> <p>The way God relates in this passage, the glory of God revealed in this passage or the character of God on display in this passage is similarly shown when Jesus . . .</p>
<p>After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . [17] Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. [18] For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb. 1:3; 2:14-18)</p>	<p>Sacrifice for Sin (Cross/resurrection/intercession): Does your text reveal a fallen condition focus, issues of sin and disordered loves, from which Jesus dies to save us? “These same issues plague us today. This is why the same God who provided for His people in our text, will ultimately do so years later when he gives us his Son . . .” “The same God who hears his people and provides a redeemer, generations later will do the same, but this time, for good . . .”</p> <p>Sympathizer with what it means to experience the fallen world: he himself has suffered . . . he is able to help . . . “The kind of misery or temptations those in our text feel remind us of the compassion/care /comfort/shared experience those in similar situations found with Jesus. Remember the scene in which . . .?”</p>
<p>[1] Therefore we must <u>pay much closer attention to what we have heard,</u> lest we drift away from it. [2] For since <u>the message declared</u> by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, [3] how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? <u>It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,</u> [4] while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb. 2:1-4)</p>	<p>Continuity of Message: Something taught in this Biblical text that Jesus or his followers in his name, likewise teach us.</p> <p>“Centuries later, this same God will teach us this same truth, through His own son (or his Son’s disciples). Remember, when Jesus said . . .?”</p>
<p>Jesus is greater than the prophets, Angels, Moses, Sabbath rest, Joshua, Priesthood, Sacrifices, High Priest, Promises, Covenant, hall of faith . . .</p>	<p>Jesus is Greater: prophets, priests, kings, sages, angels, laws, promises/fulfillment</p>

¹ ESV Study Bible

Preaching Ecclesiastes

- Preaching Jesus never means less than preaching justification by faith, but it means so much more! Be careful of shrinking Jesus by only speaking of Him in terms of one, very important, but isolated aspect of his person and work.
- Preaching Jesus does not require us to equivocate, spiritualize, or act as if those in the O.T. realized or understood or intended their connection to Jesus.

2. Preaching Jesus from the Genres Ecclesiastes Uses for Wise Instruction

- The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matt. 12:42)
- but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:24)
- And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption . . . (1 Cor. 1:30)
- In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3)

A. Wise Instruction through Propositions (Using Prosaic or Poetic speech)

[1] Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. [2] Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. [3] For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. [4] When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. [5] It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. [6] Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? [7] For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear. (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

Sample Sermon Rough Draft (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

Basic Outline	Preaching Jesus
<p>FCF: Sometimes we get hurt when we go to church (vs. 1) We begin to lose the right kind of fear and begin to feel the kind of fear we weren't meant to. (vs. 7b)</p> <p>COR: clueless and foolish people bring evil into the church (vs. 1)</p> <p>GL: we feel deeply that something is wrong about the church causing pain, because we were created for security, safety and rest in the presence of God</p> <p>Big Idea: Because God teaches us to fear him, we must go to church wisely</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wise when we hear church people speak (vs. 1-2) 2. Wise when we hear church people make promises (vs. 4-6) 3. Wise when we hear church people tell us their life goals (vs. 3 & 7) 	<p>Big Story</p> <p>Imprint of God</p> <p>Sacrifice for Sin</p> <p>Sympathizer</p> <p>Continuity of Message</p> <p>Jesus is Greater</p>

B. Wise Instruction through the Use of Questions

- Sample Sermon Rough Draft (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8)

Preaching Ecclesiastes

⁷ Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸ one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

Basic Outline	Preaching Jesus
<p>Main Point: Workaholism Enlivens our Outer Life (4:7, “I saw”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfied with no relationships • Satisfied with a life of only work • Never satisfied even though he’s rich so works all-the-more <p>Main Point: Workaholism Deadens our Inner Life (4:8, “he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Makes sense</u>: we are so fatigued with work and making money and paying bills who has time to ask bigger questions about our soul or our purpose or the quality of our relationships? • <u>They say</u>: think about someone you care about who works too much—always on the go, even those who work at home, taking kids here and there and there again and here again. Why would they say they don’t ask about the condition of their soul or purpose in life? (a) no time, (b) too tired, (c) that would be selfish (d) apathy, (e) cynicism (f) we are all stuck anyway (g) money and productivity is most important for a good life. • <u>You Say</u>: How about you? Has it been a while since you’ve asked about why you are doing what you are doing? Since you’ve asked about the condition of your relationships, your purpose in life with God? • <u>Pause</u> • <u>Move on</u> <p>Workaholism enlivens our outer life But it deadens our inner life No wonder:</p> <p>Main Point: Workaholism Gives us an Unhappy Life in the End (4:8, Proposition: This also is vanity . . . unhappy)</p>	<p>Big Story Imprint of God Sacrifice for Sin Sympathizer Continuity of Message Jesus is Greater</p>

C. Wise Instruction through Testimony/Memoir

- Sample Sermon Rough Draft (Ecclesiastes 3:16-22)

[16] Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. [17] I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. [18] I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. [19] For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. [20] All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. [21] Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? [22] So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him? (ESV)

Basic Outline	Preaching Jesus
<p>Main Point 1: God Hasn't Made Everything Right Yet "I saw" (vs. 16) Poetry A Justice B Wickedness, A Righteousness B Wickedness</p> <p>Main Point 2: God humbles us as We Wait "I said in my heart" 2x (vs. 17-20) God will judge the wicked Death comes to all creatures We too take nothing with us (proverbial saying, dust to dust)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question as a separate sub point (vs. 21), "Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to earth?" • <u>Makes sense</u>: some of us are surprised by his question. We want to say immediately that people go to heaven and animals do not. But for others of us the question of this person who believes in God makes sense to us. How would we know that animals aren't cared for in the future in some way? • <u>They say</u>: think about someone you care about who feels the care of people and animals and feels deeply the sadness of death or being judged. How might they answer this question? . . . Some are pleasantly surprised by this God-talker and are happy with the thought of animals in heaven. For others, Well, they might say, people have souls and animals do not, so obviously, animals have no future after death. But Solomon's question seems to be, how do you know that animals without souls have no after-death future? Who has told you this and what advantage would the answer give you anyway? • <u>You Say</u>: As you hear Solomon and those you know in conversation, as it were, how about you? Do you believe that you have an advantage as it relates to death and who goes where when we die? Do you believe that you are all good and have it all figured out? How do you know the way you have it all figured out is right? • <u>Pause</u> • <u>Move on</u> <p>Main Point 3: God invites us to a Joy We Otherwise Overlook "so I saw" (vs. 22) Main Point 4: God says leave the future to him, take a look at what is in front of you Question (vs. 22), "Who can bring him to see what will be after him?"</p>	<p>Big Story Imprint of God Sacrifice for Sin Sympathizer Continuity of Message Jesus is Greater</p>

D. Wise Instruction through Poetic Speech

1. Wise Instruction through Parable/Story

- Sample Sermon Rough Draft (Ecclesiastes 9:13-18)

[13] I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. [14] There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it. [15] But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. [16] But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. [17] The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. [18] Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. (Eccl. 9:13-18)

Basic Outline	Preaching Jesus
<p>FCF: we try to find greatness in all the wrong ways (the word, “great” repeated 3x in vs. 13-14)</p> <p>COR: the world around us often incentivizes foolish definitions of greatness</p> <p>GL: We long to make a difference and to matter because God created us with dignity and purpose</p> <p>Big Question: <i>What does it take to live a great life?</i></p> <p>Scene 1: vs. 14 (the little city and the great king)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Besieging • Building • Might • Shouting • Weapons of War <p><u>Small Answer:</u> Bearing with the Foolish Pursuit of False Greatness (the little city and the great king)</p> <p>Scene 2: vs. 15 (the poor man)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor (repeated 3x) • delivered the city • no one remembered <p><u>Small Answer:</u> Bearing with the Foolish Forgetfulness of Wise Greatness</p> <p>Scene 3: vs. 16 (the narrator)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • despised • not heard • quiet • better <p><u>Small Answer:</u> Listening to the Wise Whisper of Greatness (the narrator)</p> <p>Scene 4: 17-18, (teaching, moral of the story)</p> <p><u>Small Answer:</u> Taking your stand on Greatness of a different kind (the moral or teaching)</p> <p>Big Answer: <i>possessing greatness, yes, but greatness as God in his wisdom defines it</i></p>	<p>Big Story</p> <p>Imprint of God</p> <p>Sacrifice for Sin</p> <p>Sympathizer</p> <p>Continuity of Message</p> <p>Jesus is Greater</p>

2. Wise Instruction through Poem (simile, metaphor, parallelisms)

- Sample Sermon Rough Draft (Ecclesiastes 1:3-11)

Basic Outline	Preaching Jesus
<p>FCF: we want to arrive-to achieve something, to know that somehow we made a difference, this life mattered</p> <p>COR: pressures all around us to be somebody and do something that shows we arrived and achieved</p> <p>GL: we have this longing because we were created to feel complete like we had gained what we were made for</p> <p>Out of this longing and pressure the preacher asks the question: What do we gain by all of our effort in this life? (vs. 3)</p> <p>Big Question: Why is this question of gaining something in this life worth asking?</p> <p>Move 1: Because Our glory days fade (vs. 4) “Generation goes, and a generation comes.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Our Personal glory days fade Our Corporate glory days fade Death is something everyone must grapple with <p><i>Why is this question of gaining something in this life worth asking?</i></p> <p>Move 2: Because Nature goes on without us (vs. 4b-7) the earth, the sun, the wind, the streams</p> <p><i>Why is this question of gaining something in this life worth asking?</i></p> <p>Move 3: Because Everything wears out and leaves us unsatisfied (vs. 8, all things are full of weariness, mouth, eye, ear)</p> <p><i>Why is this question of gaining something in this life worth asking?</i></p> <p>Move 4: Because Is there anything that we can truly say is new? (vs. 9-10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes Sense: innovation, invention, yes the people who invent and innovate and we who consume the innovation and invention. • They Say • You Say • Pause • Move on <p><i>Why is this question of gaining something in this life worth asking?</i></p> <p>Move 5: Because Whatever We Do Will Be Forgotten (vs. 11)</p>	<p>Big Story</p> <p>Imprint of God</p> <p>Sacrifice for Sin</p> <p>Sympathizer</p> <p>Continuity of Message</p> <p>Jesus is Greater</p>

3. Wise Instruction through Proverbs

- Sample Sermon Clues (Ecclesiastes 7:1-13)

Basic outline	Preaching Jesus
[1] A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.	
[2] It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. [3] Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. [4] The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.	Big Story Imprint of God Sacrifice for Sin Sympathizer Continuity of Message Jesus is Greater
[5] It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. [6] For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.	
[7] Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.	
[8] Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.	
[9] Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools	
[10] Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" for it is not from wisdom that you ask this.	

Conclusion: Preaching Jesus from the Genres of Ecclesiastes

The Gospel, Isaiah, and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-35)