

You Are Here... Ecclesiastes pt. 1. (we start with a clean copy of this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Are9dDbW24>)

1. [video of universe] In every age, in every culture, humanity has been at a crossroads, a crisis point. It's what we do. Those who adapt, engineer, think, and respond with wisdom and sweat tend to survive the moment. Those who don't...don't.
2. I believe a case could be made that we are most comfortable in crisis. A Swedish socialist who works for the UN, Hans Rosling, wrote an amazing book called "Factfulness" about a year ago that explodes the idea that life on earth is awful and getting worse. A prominent atheist named Michael Schermer wrote "The Moral Arc" to show in stark facts and figures that humanity is kinder, less violent, more caring and sharing than it has ever been in recorded history. So...why are we constantly terrified?
3. Some of this can be put down to media and politicians' fearmongering. It is much easier to get people to give you money and power if they are afraid and if they believe you have a solution, a way out of their current crisis. (gold, money, retirement, drugs, education, and the "other") I spend a great deal of time on this subject with law enforcement groups around the country.
4. But we cannot ignore our biology or chemistry. We were wired for a much more dangerous world than the one we inhabit. We were wired to believe that the rustle in the grass was a snake or a lion. We were wired to sit around the campfire and share stories of chases, hunts, failures, and fear (not how we cried at a sunset).
5. Suicide is now the leading cause of death worldwide among 10-30 year olds. Why? It isn't because reality is so terrible (in most cases), but because they have lost their hope and their sense of meaning. They have no anchor, no center.
6. Can we at least try to understand why? Yes, we are the richest, healthiest, best fed, and safest generation in history...but we are constantly bombarded by fearmongering. We are told that we are accidents from a long ago explosion in the nothingness of space. We are told that we have no meaning, that the universe doesn't know or

care that we are here and will not miss us when we are gone. There is no God, no ultimate law or morality, and facts can be bent and tossed aside at will...and woe be unto any of you who say otherwise (JK Rowling and what happens when you state biological facts).

7. You are only valued if you are rich and famous. The pathways for that fame are, we are told, limited to those who are beautiful, talented, and lucky. Sports, music, movies...but, at the same time, we attack those who are wealthy who earned their money through hard work as robber barons or the evil rich. (evil is no respecter of persons among the rich or poor)
8. We are also told that our planet is going to be lost forever in the next 5, 10, or 12 yrs. That we were also told that at several other times in the last century is never mentioned. So...those 10-30yr olds have no path forward. They are lost and fear that the future holds nothing but loneliness, illness, and economic and climatic collapse.
9. Now do you understand why suicide is the leading cause of death among so many segments of our population? It doesn't matter that the facts say we should be rejoicing...we cower in fear because we have been told that we should and that fear is the only proper reaction one can have to what we see before us.
10. God created us. I believe that. And, once created, God placed us in this place, this garden, and gave us a job: take care of it. Guard it. Make this a safe and wonderful place now and for those who will come later. [Genesis 1:27-30]
11. Even today, psychologists and sociologists tell us that we need three things to be fulfilled: meaning, responsibility, and intimacy. God gave that to the first humans – they were made to be a part of God's family, given a task, and could look forward to walks in the Garden with their Father.
12. What is your meaning? Responsibility? Where do you find intimacy? Don't confuse these things with success, jobs, and sex; this is much, much deeper than that.

13. To help us on this journey, we will go to a book called Ecclesiastes. [Ecclesiastes 1:1-11] You will be forgiven if you wonder why a book like this is in the Bible. It certainly doesn't read like a book offering us hope and eternal life with Jesus, our Messiah! It is a book that confronts us with a great reality that we really must confront: if you are trying to find your meaning by using measuring sticks available on earth, you will fail. By now unit of measure can we see WHY we are here and WHO we are and WHAT will become of us while we are here and after we are gone. The world just isn't prepared to help us with these questions.
14. We thought we'd be forever entertained when we got more than 2-3 TV stations, or when we got a new car, or when we got smart phones. But the world kept aging and so did we. We were never allowed to stay happy where we were. No, we are told, you don't matter yet. Your life isn't meaningful yet.
15. We are going to pour over this book and other books of wisdom this year as we answer the big questions, the only questions that matter. Invite people to join us. This is going to be unlike any other series you might have heard, for we cannot understand the who and why of us until we also understand the who and why of the One who came in from outside our box and changed everything.
16. But let's not rush there. We tend to do that. We miss such drama and nuance in our rush to get to the moral at the end of a Bible story. We rush to speak of grace before we deal with the crushing, terrifying, horrific reality of sin...and, therefore, cheapen grace. (grace is a book of love written in someone else's blood).
17. If there is no God...if there is only us...what is the point? (behold the genesis of our current angst and the spike in suicide). [Ecclesiastes 1:12-18] We are going on a journey to see if there is anything out there that can satisfy us other than God. Spoiler alert: no...and you already know that. Ecclesiastes makes us confront what we already know: we are play acting, pretending, but we know we are...and that is why we feel so empty.

18. “Empty” is a dangerous place to be, a dangerous condition. So, as we begin, let us ask to be filled. **[Mark, please lead us in Holy Spirit You Are Welcome Here” or “This is the Air I Breathe”]**