



We Didn't Start the Fire

August 7, 2022

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 (MSG)

Connect

- Billy Joel's *We Didn't Start the Fire* was the Broadway member submitted song of focus for week five of our sermon series, "*Then Sings My Soul: Finding Sacred Hope in Secular Music.*" If you have familiarity with the song, speak to your memories of it. Pull up the song on the streaming source of your choosing and play it for the group. Share initial impressions. Name what sticks out to you and why.

Engage

- Read *Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 (MSG)*. Read this in *The Message* version of the Bible for its plain and common English approach to the Quester's words. Could it be any more of a downer? Pull out some of your favorite phrases and consider their pessimism. Do you relate to these sentiments? Why? Why not?
- Billy Joel's famed song topped the charts in 1989. Known as a "*list song*," it's fast-paced lyrics include brief references to 118 significant political, cultural, scientific, and sporting events between 1949, the year of Joel's birth, and 1989, in a mainly chronological order. The song seems to suggest "*Not my fault*" and "*Can't do anything about it*" as if "*that's just the way life goes.*" The Quester from Ecclesiastes agrees. This is sort of the "*it is what it is*" philosophy of life. What are the advantages to adopting this view? What are the disadvantages?
- Joel was inspired to write the song after a young adult says to him, "*You don't know what it's like to turn 21 these days. Everyone knows nothing happened in the 50's when you were growing up.*" Does every generation believe their elders don't understand their struggles and that the next generation has it "*way easier than they did?*" Explain your answer.
- More than a few people are surprised to find Ecclesiastes in the Bible because it is perhaps the most famous witness to the experience of futility. God barely gets mentioned at all. The writer's task is to expose our total incapacity to find the meaning and completion of our lives on our own. The suggestion is that "*the world*" promises everything but ultimately delivers nothing. This clears the air. And once the air is cleared, we are ready for reality – for God. Can you relate to such a quest? How?

Next Steps

- Download Billy Joel's *We Didn't Start the Fire* and listen to it several times through. Each time, pull out words, phrases or ideas as you hear them and reflect further on what is being said. Feel the music and discern how it makes you feel. What of this song might shape you moving forward in a positive way?

Pray

"The sacred and secular dance together at all times, God. Thank you for moving through a lyric or a riff in a way that gets right to our souls. Music is so often the direct beat of our spirits. Keep us leaning in and living eyes and ears forward. Help us fight the fires of injustice with your love. Amen."