

Ecclesiastes 1: 1-7; “Yet the Sea is Not Full”, Sermon # 1 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 17th, 2014, In the Afternoon Worship Service.

The book begins with a rather mysterious declaration of who is writing it. It begins with saying that these are the words of the “Preacher, the son of David, the king in Jerusalem.” I believe that this can be none other than Solomon, King David’s son, who in this book is preaching a sermon. He is preaching a sermon which shows forth the vanity of this life when God and His wisdom, God and His commandments, are not received and lived by. Why doesn’t Solomon simply come out and call himself by his own name? He states the fact that he is King David’s son, but he doesn’t speak of himself as king until verse 12 of the first chapter. I believe that the reason that he doesn’t state his own name is because he, the great king in Israel, is truly ashamed and repentant over the way that he has lived his life. He was given more wisdom than any man of that generation, and yet he himself did not live wisely in accordance with God’s Word. We shall see the proof of this in many places in the book. The proposition of Solomon’s sermon is that a man cannot be truly happy if he only pursues worldly interests and pleasures and investments. He calls this, “life under the sun”. It is trying to find the meaning of life apart from God and His commandments. Solomon calls himself the Preacher because he himself has learned some lessons in life the hard way, and now that he is old, he would like to preach the truth of his own repentance of living a lifestyle of “life under the sun.” He begins the sermon by declaring his negative conclusion first. “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

So 1st of all- Let us try to define what Vanity is.

The word vanity in the Hebrew is the word, Hebel. It occurs no less than 37 times in the book. Primarily it means “breath”, and “light wind”. The word vanity in the original Hebrew means “a thing insufficient and worthless, that soon vanishes away, like a vapor or a bubble.” (Taylor’s Hebrew Concordance) In the margin of my Bible it states that other words for vanity are absurdity, frustration, futility, and nonsense. There are certain things which are mentioned as vanity in the first 6 chapters of this book: labor, greatness in an earthly sense, earthly wisdom and knowledge in regard to gardening, possessions, music, laughter and mirth, power and position. When we read this we can begin to understand what Solomon means by vanity. Solomon was looking more for meaning and lasting satisfaction in the good things of the earth which God had given him in this life; but as much as he tried, he found that their profit and satisfaction did not last. The more that he labored at it, and the more that he searched for satisfaction in building an earthly kingdom, the more he worked at building a satisfying and productive earthly life, the more elusive and uncertain the continuance of those things was to him; and to the people that he loved, and to the kingdom that he ruled over. The vanity of vanities is that all is vanity. All of life under the sun; all of life simply considered in itself, apart from the knowledge of God and the blessing of God upon anything that we are, become, or do; is filled with vanity. It does not bring the lasting satisfaction that one would think that it would. There is an frustration, there is a disappointment, and there is an emptiness that comes to the person who pursues life in this way, in the final analysis.

2ndly – Solomon uses the example of what man labors for, which may be done in vain.

He says in verse 3, “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.” He has thought about the generations of men that so quickly go by and pass away. Each one labors and toils, but what is the result? Something that lasts and will stand forever? No. It is something that will last for that generation and then will fade away, eventually passing

away into oblivion. A man's house and his estate, which he has spent so much time building, he cannot continue in it because of death. He passes it on to his children; they sell it and spend the proceeds and someone else comes to live in it. But all of what he has tried to do and establish and have last, it all comes to vanity. It is at this point that the mind of the Christian raises a question. "But is it not true that in all labor there is profit," as it says in Proverbs 14: 23? "In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty." Does this not contradict what we have been reading in Ecclesiastes? I think that we only need to understand that there are 2 different sorts of labor in this world. One is tainted with vanity and it reaps only temporary results; and the other has God's glory and his grace in mind. And this does yield eternal rewards.

Let's look at the labor which is tainted with vanity. Turn with me to over to Psalm 49: 16. It says here, "Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." "Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light." "A man who is in honor, yet does not understand is like the beasts that perish." You see, this truly is vanity. This is labor tainted with no other goal than to please yourself and impress other people. Now turn with me to the gospel of John Chapter 6: 27. We find here the principle of labor which will turn an eternal profit. "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." You can see from what Lord Jesus is saying, that if you labor to understand the spiritual things, the principles of wisdom that give real understanding; this is the food that nourishes the soul and satisfies and sustains the soul when earthly satisfactions, and even earthly food, will not encourage you. This food endures to eternal life. Your soul has been fed and satisfied and God Himself is there, working in your heart, to be the strength of it forever.

Jesus always taught the importance of having spiritual understanding. It is possible to have worldly and earthly understanding, and yet not have spiritual understanding. Turn with me to Matthew 13: 10-12. "And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?'" "He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.'" "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." You see, "A man who is in honor, yet who does not understand is like the beasts that perish." What a great vanity it is, to live life without the spiritual understanding which comes from God Himself, through Jesus Christ our Lord. How important it is to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; it is worth more than all the world. Many generations of people have come and gone, and yet every generation has the same problem. The problem is that life is vain unless you come to the knowledge of God. Everything that you have will not last, and in the end, everything that is earthly and worldly will be taken away from you. This is not true of spiritual understanding. To the one who has spiritual understanding, more shall be given. More and more is given; and there is more and more satisfaction which comes from it, for it stays with you and it builds and accumulates in your mind and heart.

This building up of spiritual knowledge and understanding is referred to by our Lord as treasure stored up in heaven, over in Matthew 6: 19-21 if you will turn with me over there. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I want to ask you this afternoon whether you are storing up treasure in heaven? Are you living a heavenly life? Are you seeking things above rather than things upon

the earth. Have you died to sin and the allurements of the world with Christ? Are you so trusting in God and in Christ that your life is hidden with these blessed Persons of the Godhead? Are you cultivating the secret life of communion with God and Christ? Where is your treasure located? In earth, or in heaven? Only you and God can answer this question.

3rdly- Solomon illustrates this truth of vanity by using illustrations from nature.

(Verses 5-9)

“The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose.” “The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on to its circuit.” “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.” “All things are full of labor; man cannot express it.” “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” What Solomon mentions first is the regularity and speed of the sun’s motions around the earth. It rises and goes down. It hastens to the place where it arose. This is a grand and brilliant picture of a man’s daily labors. Every day he gets up, goes to his business, and then goes home. He hastens through his labor in order to get home again, and once there, he is too tired to do much of anything else. He goes to bed and gets up the next day to engage in the same round of duties, and after a few years of this; it becomes very wearisome to him. That is, without bringing God into it. But when you think about arising each day with Christ, you remember that His rising is like that mentioned in Psalm 19, verse 4 – “In the heavens God has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run His race. Please remember that when the Son of God arises, it is with “healing in His wings”, for all those trusting in Him, and therefore nothing is really vain, but all is full of meaning.

The next illustration is the wind. “The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north, and whirls about continually, and comes again to its circuit.” The wind is much more unpredictable in its motions than the sun. There are many things which happen during a man’s days under the sun which cause his experience to be interesting to him because there are unpredictable factors, things which come just because there are many details to a person’s labor and many people interacting with those details. Things which come out of nowhere and affect his everyday routine. This is interesting to him and is something that he must pay attention to in his labors every day. And yet, after a while, he begins to know their movements in his life as well, and this becomes vanity to him. He is able somewhat to predict the things that are going to happen to him in the course of the day; sometimes they are interesting; and sometimes they are a nuisance.

It is like looking out your dining room window and it is very snowy outside and the wind is blowing just like the verse that we are studying here. It is strong and it is “whirling about continually.” You want to help the mailman. The mailman is coming to deliver you your mail, even if the weather is bad. You dig paths through the snow for the mailman to be able to walk through, because the snow is deep. But the wind keeps covering up the paths that you make. All of your previous labor has been in vain. You must go out once again to reestablish the path. The Lord Jesus is the Divine Mailman. He is delivering the promises of God to you. He is delivering the word of love and acceptance from the Father. It is wonderful to watch the wind from inside where you are protected. Christ has done everything necessary for your salvation. And you want to help Him in His kingdom work. But it wearisome to think about having to go outside to labor in the snow again. Remember this; that it is never vain to work for Christ. If Christ is the one whom you are laboring for, then all of your labor will not be in vain in Him. You can always be abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labors will bring an eternal harvest and will be profitable in every way. There is satisfaction in this kind of labor, whether it is repetitive

or not. The Lord is pleased with it, and you also can be satisfied with doing it. The Lord alone is the only one who can establish all of your works for you so that they are profitable to you, and will bring glory to him. Whereas, if the Lord is “not in the wind”, if in your mind He is not in all the adversity and difficulties that you face in your labor, then you will not be able to find satisfaction or peace in the many things that you will do. You will find yourself blaming people that you work with, and you will try very hard to control all the events in your work experience. Because of this, you may end up being a very anxious or bitter person if you cannot succeed in gaining control of these things. But you should remember that godliness with contentment is great gain. (1st Timothy 6: 6) You brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that you will carry nothing out. If you desire to be rich in an earthly sense you will only fall “into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” In order to combat vanity you must learn to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life to which you were called.

The final illustration is the rivers which flow into the sea. “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.” (Verse 7) Even though the rivers run to the sea; yet the sea is not full. This is also the way it is with the labor of men who live “under the sun”. All things are full of labor according to this worldly, earthly man who will not believe that God is real; that He is the reason for our existence. We should live and labor to His glory. But the eye of the worldly man is never ultimately satisfied with his labor, just seeing the sights and hearing the sounds of what he works at. He is only concerned with getting the job done and seeing pay for it. But the person that truly likes his work; it is because he has glimpsed something of the greatness and goodness of God to ordain work as something which good for man. Only God can give lasting satisfaction to man’s work. And indeed He does, to the person who thinks about himself in relation to the God who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. His greatest gift is His Only-begotten Son. In Him there is a fullness which all who believe in Him come to find experientially. “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. Oh may each of us see the difference between the vanity of earthly labors and pursuits that do not bring real satisfaction. It is like the rivers running to the sea, but the sea is not full. We are never ultimately satisfied with the world and worldly things. But having Christ, and laboring with Him is profitable in every sense; for this world and the world to come.