

**Ecclesiastes 1: 8-15; “I, the Preacher, was King”, Sermon # 2 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
August 24th, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We have seen in our introductory study how all of life under the sun is vanity. Vanity we said can be defined as “breath”, and “light wind”. The word vanity in the original Hebrew means “a thing insufficient and worthless; a thing 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”. Last week we looked at the subject of labor and the great vanity that is in our labor, if all of our works are only going to be established for the generation that we live in. We saw that they soon pass away, or else that someone else will inherit them. They may not know how to use them wisely or profitably and so all of what we have worked for is lost. But thankfully, we also saw that when we work as unto the Lord and as we are diligent in His service; that all of our labor is profitable. In this 2nd section of the 1st Chapter we find the Preacher taking on the subject of the boasted pride of man. He looks first at things which men boast in that are new. Then he turns to the subject of earthly and natural wisdom. And so this is what we will think about for a few minutes together this afternoon.

1st- The boasted pride of things that are new. (Verses 9-11)

“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.” “Is there anything of which is may be said, “See, this is new?” When we think about things that are new, or things that are made by man, there may be many things which seem to be new, which really are not. The buildings that are built in our day; are they any greater than the pyramids of Egypt, or the Parthenon in Greece? Are they greater than the temple which Solomon built? They may be greater in size or dimension, but not necessarily in beauty. There may be many architectural novelties from generation to generation, but what Solomon is trying to convey here is the idea of men in every generation trying to do something which would be new. The Tower of Babel was something which was new to that generation; trying to build a tower whose top would reach to heaven. But if you will turn over to Genesis 11, you will see the truth of what Solomon was trying to convey. “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.” “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.” “Then they said to one another, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” “But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.”

What was the goal which the sons of men made for themselves? It was to “make a name for themselves.” It was to promote the glory of their own skill, their own ability, their own unity of purpose apart from what God would have them to do. It was to show everyone else in the world that then was, that they were great. Thus newness, and their own greatness, were being combined in their labor. They were saying: “This is what we will do.” “This is what we will build.” “The boasted product of our hands, our accomplishment, will make a name for ourselves.” But it says, “The Lord came down to see.” And what did He conclude from what He saw? Verse 6 says, “And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.’” God acknowledges their unity of purpose and their ability to work hard together to accomplish what they purposed. But He obviously was not pleased with their motive for doing what they were doing. They would not build to His glory, which is what they should have purposed. But rather they sought their own glory. What was God’s response to their concept of “newness”? It was to say, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may

not understand one another's speech." "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the earth, and they ceased building the city." This is why Solomon could so readily conclude in verse 10, "Is there anything of which it may be said, "See this is new?" "It has already been in ancient times before us." "There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after."

In other words, this principle of man's boasted pride in his accomplishments is as old as fallen man. All the generations of fallen man, living life under the sun, as they go down through time have failed to come up with something really new. All that was given to them in terms of the raw materials that men work with, is what God before has created. All that man does with those raw materials to try and build something great to the memory of his own name is forgotten. They may seem new to men in their own generation, but actually the motives and the impulses which lead to the building of these great works, these great devices, these great things that man values, all come from the same source of boasted pride. It is so that man can say, "See, this is new." This is not to deprecate the good and great discoveries which God has allowed men to make in relation his ability to communicate or travel or to make progress in helping other men in a righteous way. Whether it is computers, or cars, or medicines or machines which help men to labor in a righteous sense; all of these things are the gifts of God, even though a man may discover the leading principles of their existence. They all are of God; whether electricity, or telephones, or various forms of transportation; it all depends on the way that men use these devices and the reasons that they make them or own them, that tells God what He should do about them. "God created man upright," it says in Ecclesiastes 7: 29, "but he has sought out many devices." That is, his own ways of reasoning and using the things of this life in a sinful independent way, not caring for God's glory, or showing any concern for His approval.

I think of the that great ocean liner, the Titanic. When she was made, she was the greatest ship of her day. But the boast of men, which by the way I used to sing of as a child was, "This was the ship that the waves could never go through." This kind of language is more than a little provoking to God. It was on her maiden voyage that the Titanic struck an iceberg which tore a long gash in her hull and she went down with 1,523 passengers dying. Only 705 were rescued. One of the reasons that so many died was that there were not enough life boats on board. A person looking at the statistics would have to conclude that those who made the great boat did not really believe that she would ever sink. But she did, on her first time out. The boasted pride of men will not allow them to acknowledge their need of God to help them analyze their own works. But this is exactly what we must do if we would go to heaven. Those who were passengers on the ship were trusting in the work and devices of men to bring them safely to their destination. But it was no doubt true that there were many who learned to pray on that dark and fateful night. We should understand that God considers all of our works and all of our ways. He sees all the motives for our building, our buying, and our use of all of our possessions. If what we do and what we own does not glorify Him, He is at perfect liberty to take it all away, and take us down to destruction. Let us remember that there is no remembrance of the former things. We only have the accounts and the remains of the glory of past generations. Let us live to the glory of God.

Now 2ndly- Solomon considers earthly and natural wisdom, but even more importantly, spiritual wisdom. (Verses 12-15)

"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem." "And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised." "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind." "What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered." The word for "God" which is used in this book of Ecclesiastes 39 times, is the word "Elohim". The word Jehovah is not used once in

this book. I think that the reason for this is because this is the word which could most easily be used to describe God's relationship not only to believers, those who are in covenant with Him, but also unbelievers, those whom He has created and rules over, even though they do not acknowledge Him. The "burdensome task" that Elohim has given to the sons of men is to "search out wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven." This is just what Solomon was peculiarly fitted to be able to do since he was King in Jerusalem. God had given Solomon wisdom like the sand of the sea. If you will turn over to 1 Kings 4, verse 29, you will see his wisdom spoken of. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore." "Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt." "For he was wiser than all men – than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations." "He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five." "Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish." "And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon."

We have already spoken of the works of men trying to live "life under the sun". But now we see some real wisdom. It is wisdom given to this king Solomon, a man who was able to investigate things that God made, and to show forth the truth that these were the works of God. Solomon was no evolutionist. He was in a much better position to know wisdom and to discern truth; more than any other man of his day. He knew that God's works of creation were meant to be studied. He remembered the inspired words of his father David in Psalm 111, verses 1-3. "Praise the Lord!" "I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation." "The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them." "His work is honorable and glorious." Solomon rejoiced in the works of the Lord; do you? And, it was because God gave him peculiar and particular wisdom and knowledge in relation to them, that he rejoiced in them. It was God that gave Solomon "exceeding great understanding and largeness of heart" to do these things in the investigation of the natural world. Let us remember that God gives men a variety of levels of understanding of our natural world. He can give this to believers such as Sir Isaac Newton, and He can give it to unbelievers such as Einstein. But He is never arbitrary in His gifts. Each natural gift in a person has a purpose, just as spiritual gifts do. God is sovereign over such things and gives these natural gifts and abilities according to His sovereign wisdom, so that His own great purposes for the outworking of human history will be fulfilled. Why were so many Jewish men given the ability to discover God's principles of mathematics and physics so that this country was able to put together the first atomic bomb? These discoveries allowed the Allies to defeat Germany in World War II and the Jews to come back to their own ancient land. Why have so many Jewish men been prominently involved in music, banking, and other cultural breakthroughs and discoveries? I believe that it is because God has a future purpose for them, that they shall eventually be converted as a nation and become Christ's greatest witnesses.

Solomon came to know very much the vanity of his pursuit of earthly wisdom and receiving the accolades of men to the wisdom that God had given to him. Even with all of his studies and all the knowledge that he accumulated from all those studies, he still failed to live up to the spiritual truth and wisdom that had been given to him by God. He built the temple, he took 13 years to build his own house, the Lord revealed Himself to him twice. The queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to test him with hard questions and there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. She said to him, "Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard." "Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!" "Blessed be the Lord your God, who

delighted in you, sitting you on the throne of Israel.” “Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.” But in chapter 11 of 1st Kings we see that Solomon's investigations went into areas forbidden to him by God. “But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh; women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites – from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you.’” “Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” “Solomon clung to these in love.” Why this defection from God after he gave him so much? It was because Solomon had to learn the hard way, that there are two kinds of wisdom in this life. There is the knowledge which comes from God which is bounded by His commandments. And then there is the knowledge of everything in this world; some of which may be good and some not so good. It would take the grace of Christ for him to learn to distinguish between the precious and the vile. It will take the same thing for us as well. This wisdom, which comes from above, comes by the knowledge of God's Word, and being sensitive to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. There are many vain things which men pursue in this life. Let us pray to be taught by God. Psalm 32, verses 8-10 – “I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye.” “Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.” “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.”