

SERMON FOR AUGUST 4, 2019
TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 1: 2
THEME: VANITY OF VANITY,

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

In the name of Jesus:

In the house where I grew up there was a room known as the Powder Room. It was a small room, set off to the side, across from the Master Bedroom, where my mom and dad had a Vanity. A Vanity is a piece of furniture, with a large picture mirror attached to it on the top of the cabinet, and a small chair to sit. In this Powder Room a woman could sit on the chair looking into the mirror of the Vanity, and see the reflection of her, in order to put on makeup. That is why the piece of furniture was called a Vanity; it was a piece of furniture so constructed so that people could look at themselves in the mirror.

The Old Testament lesson for today is a pathway for us to look in the mirror. As we look in the mirror, we see ourselves, and we see the world as it really is.

The Book of Ecclesiastes was written by one of the wisest men who had ever lived, King Solomon. Solomon, one of the greatest and powerful kings to ever have walked the earth, makes many observations

about life in this book, and in all of his observations, he comes to a startling conclusion. “All is to no purpose, all the ways of man are to no purpose. I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I gave my heart to searching out wisdom in all things, to the man with whom he is pleased, God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he gives the work of getting goods together and storing up wealth, to give to him in whom God has pleasure. This again is to no purpose and desire for wind.”

What Solomon is observing and saying from practical experience is that as a human being he has tried and experienced everything that life had to offer. God blessed him with riches, wisdom, insight, and power. So much so that Solomon reveled in the things of God and forgot about God. You see, the Book of Ecclesiastes is something akin to the last testament of Solomon. He tells us and everyone who will listen that he has learned some hard lessons in life. Even though God blessed him beyond measure, he, Solomon, had forgotten about God. He placed his faith in the stuff he had, he loved the things he possessed so much that he forgot about God. How do we know that? Listen to what the Bible says about Solomon: “ His wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and

his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel” (1 Kings 11: 3-4, 6, 9).

Solomon had forsaken his first love. And so he writes today to warn us against doing the same thing he did. That is why he says that everything is vanity. When we look at life, we see the physical and forget the One who has given to us the physical. We place importance and emphasis on the things of the world and forget God and His will.

That is what was happening in the Gospel lesson for today. Family members were squabbling about who should get what of the family inheritance. They were trying to get rich in life, but not get rich in God. And so Jesus tells them this story, we know it as the Parable of the Rich Fool. Jesus says:” Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all

my grain and my goods.¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

The foolishness of Solomon can make us wise unto salvation. For Solomon tells us: “Look people, listen to me. I have tried it all. I have had everything anyone could possibly imagine. And in the end, what did I get? Nothing. Because the things of life will all pass away. Death comes to everyone and everything. So there has to be more to life than possessions. And there is! There is a better way! And I, Solomon, will show you.

And so, after spending 11 chapters of his book talking about how everything in the end is reduced to nothing in the sight of God, there is one thing that is important to remember and one thing that makes life worth living. His name is Jesus. Solomon says: “To the man with whom God is pleased he gives wisdom, knowledge and joy.” God is pleased with you and all today, not on account of anything we have done, for we have all at times loved the world and its possessions in place of God. But God is One who seeks not to punish the sinner but to

save the sinner. To that end God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world, not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. Jesus did so by doing the will of the Heavenly Father, loving God above everything else and then giving Himself in love for sinners, for He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might know the righteousness of God in Him. With His blood shed on Calvary God has washed away your sins, buying your life back from sin, Satan, and death with the price of Jesus' own life and death. God has done all of this so that you might now live your life in thanks to God for all that He has done for you in Jesus. Living your life so that Jesus' life is shown forth in and through you.

As God's children we are painfully aware that the material things we all too often live for are like chasing after the wind, we strive for them, thinking that if we have the material, we can be at peace. But in the end, it is like chasing the wind, and we end up with nothing. So God calls us to repentance and faith. To confess our sins, including envy, covetousness, before God for He is faithful and just and will forgive your sins in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to do the will of the Father, to love Him with all of His heart, mind, and strength. Out of love for the Father and you He went to the cross, enduring the pain and shame of the cross so that you would be God's beloved child. Jesus suffered and was forsaken

on the cross, so that God would never forsake you. Today He calls you again to follow Him anew, trusting in Jesus, loving the Lord your God with all your strength through loving and serving others.

Solomon concludes the book of Ecclesiastes by saying: “¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

The theme of Ecclesiastes is “Vanity of vanity, everything is vanity.” Everything in this life will end in death. Only one thing matters in life, that who and is eternal. So live your life trusting in Christ as your Savior and seek to live out your faith in Christ among others. Be wise unto salvation, following Jesus, for Jesus gives true and lasting meaning to life. You have died to sin, and your life is hidden with Christ. Seek first His Kingdom and righteousness. For the life of Christ is a life not lived in vain, but lived to the glory of God into the eternal ages.

Amen