

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:18-26

^{1:2}"Nothing but vapor," Ecclesiastes said. "Totally vapor. Everything is just vapor that vanishes."

^{2:18}I also hated all the results of my hard work, for which I worked so hard under the sun, since I must leave it all to the man who comes after me. ¹⁹And who knows—will he be wise, or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the results of my hard work, for which I worked so hard and so wisely, under the sun. This too is vapor that vanishes.

²⁰So I changed my course, and my heart began to despair over all my hard work at which I worked so hard under the sun. ²¹Sure, there may be a man who has worked hard—wisely, aptly, and skillfully. But he must hand over whatever he accumulated by all his hard work to a man who has not worked hard for it. This too is vapor. It's so unfair! ²²For what does a man gain through all his hard work, through all the turmoil in his heart as he works so hard under the sun?

²³Pain fills his days. His occupation is frustration. Even at night his heart does not rest. This too is vapor.

²⁴There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink and to find joy in his work. This too, I saw, is from God's hand. ²⁵For who can eat or enjoy himself apart from him? ²⁶Yes, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness to the man whom he considers good, but to the person who goes on sinning God gives the task of gathering and collecting, but only so that he can give it all to a person whom God considers good. This too is vapor, nothing but chasing wind.



Intro: I would like everyone to think of four things about your future you don't know for sure. Is it what you'll do for a living? Whom you will marry? How healthy you will be? How wealthy you will be?

Alright, then I want everyone to think about how long those four things will last. How long? Your whole life? Most of your life? Part of your life? Will it depend on how faithful you are with those things? How long?

For King Solomon, his rule started with wisdom. But as Solomon lived life, he changed. He decided his life should be about 1) amassing great wealth, 2) working himself nearly to death, 3) fulfilling all his wildest pleasures, and 4) being smarter and wiser than anyone ever. These were the four things Solomon spent a lifetime doing.

Solomon was incredibly wise. He achieved those four things.

Yet not one of those things really gave Solomon what he needed. In the process, Solomon seemed to have lost the One who gave him wisdom. He seemed to have lost faith in the God of all things; the God of all work, all play, all knowledge, and all creation. Then it seems that at the end of his life, as he wrote this book of the Bible

known as Ecclesiastes, that Solomon finally figured out how vain and meaningless all his life's endeavors were. Solomon learned that ...

LIFE WITHOUT GOD IS MEANINGLESS

I. YOU CAN'T TAKE WEALTH WITH YOU

We know this is true because our life goals and possessions outlast us. They do not last long for us.

Someone else gets them when we die. You can't take wealth with you.

The wealth of an industrious consumer often falls into the hands of a good-for-nothing. You have quite possibly seen someone else take credit for your hard work. How much more when death comes to us?

Solomon was incredibly wise, but he grew to hate his life – riches, wisdom, pleasure, and all. He still felt bitter and uncomfortable. He still felt lonely. His sin was always before him. He was still subject to death.

Now, it may sound like a pessimistic Jewish king. But what Solomon wrote nearly 3,000 years ago could be said of the American mother, the average business partner, the 2019 consumer, or the modern child.

Are you happy? Many of us will say we are reasonably happy. No major problems here. We may not need "professional help." But we all will confess a stinging conscience filled with grief over life mistakes. Apart from God, we each lack meaning and purpose, because nothing truly lasts. Where we are going, what good are diamonds and gold? What good is a monopoly of power? What good would it be to win the highest election in the land? What good is real estate beyond a burial plot? None of this can come with us where we are going.

This is a harsh statistical reality. Not many men and women go down in history. Who will remember my name? Maybe my descendants for a few generations, but why *my name* more than my sister or mother or son? Finally only a handful of people are really remembered, and we are vapor, vanity, meaningless.

This is also a scientific fact. Final entropy demands personal meaninglessness. The big picture is a universe that slowly spreads out until its final heat-death, too cold for any life. Long before that the sun will make this planet unlivable.

What I'm getting at is that, lacking God in the equation, we are nothing.

Jesus agreed with Solomon when He said, "*The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life*" (John 12:25). Jesus certainly did not mean that we should hate the gift of life.

However, whoever is realistic about how bad it is in this life will be in just the right condition to hear about the next life.

Understand this: the Lord has written on our hearts that there is more. This material world isn't all there is. We each have a longing for something greater, something more, something that finally gives us rest.

We have been to the dark mines of sin and picked away for gold when it won't count for peanuts in the world to come. The stuff of science is only a summary of what we know about the created world; the Creator holds out deeper meaning and hope.

Solomon showed that by saying, "Eat, drink, and find satisfaction in ... work." This seems to beg the question. How can one follow the Teacher's advice and "find satisfaction in his work" when, as Solomon has so powerfully demonstrated, labor is meaningless and a chasing after the wind?

The king immediately answers that this is possible only "from the hand of God."

II. REAL WORTH IS FROM THE HAND OF GOD

God's hand symbolizes His power, and that power is boundless. As Jesus said, "*With God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26). If you want to enjoy real worth, you must see the hand of God in what you have.

Here faith enters the picture. Only faith in Jesus Christ can give something that lasts. Only faith can give density to the vapor we know as life. Faith alone can see through this fallen world's dark vapor of vanity. Faith alone sees the bright love and mercy of the almighty God. Scripture states, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God*" (Hebrews 11:6).

This means the person who "*pleases God*" is none other than the believer.

If you don't believe in Jesus, this life is as good as it gets;
if you believe in Jesus, this life is as bad as it gets.

If you want your food to taste better than ever, you must trust that it comes from the hand of a God who holds out the hope of heaven. If you want to enjoy each drop of what you drink now, you must believe in the Water of Life, who gives a drink that quenches all our thirst for eternity. If you want to really enjoy life, rest in the sure hope that there is no end to that joy.

Solomon puts the one who pleases God in contrast to the sinner. Though all are sinners, the term here (verse 26) applies only to the unbelieving sinner. This sinner "keeps on sinning," without repenting. This sinner possesses nothing, while the sinner who believes in Jesus receives all good things.

At first glance this assertion of Solomon doesn't seem to fit with reality. Often the ungodly are very wealthy. Martin Luther quickly solves the apparent problem:

"In short, the pious truly possess the whole world, because they enjoy it with happiness and tranquility. But the impious do not possess it even when they have it. This is the vanity which the impious possess."

If you want to really possess God's blessings, see them by faith as from the hand of God.

I would like everyone to think of four things about your future you DO know for sure ... Here are mine:

- God will be with me.
- My sins are forgiven.
- Jesus will come back on the last day.
- Faith alone will bring me to heaven.

Whatever else may come, sure or unsure. By faith alone, take it happily from the hand of the Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.
