

The Supreme Vanity

What profit do you have from all your labor?

Ecclesiastes 1.1–11

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • October 31, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2021

Scripture Reader and Reading: Carl Peugh – Second Corinthians 5.16–17

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – Things that matter the most

Prelude:

I. The American Civil Liberties Union, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, many atheists, evolutionists, and humanists seek a secular America.

- A. They file lawsuits to keep Christianity away from the public.
- B. They protest any public sign of Christianity.
- C. Some of them ridicule those who believe in God.

II. If they live out the course they have set,

- A. some will discover emptiness.
- B. Some may confess the emptiness of life without God.

III. The Book of Ecclesiastes refutes the secularization of life.

Persuasion:

I. Ecclesiastes 1.1 • The Words of the Preacher

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

- A. Solomon sounds more like a preacher and a prophet than a politician.
- B. We know him primarily as a king.
 - 1. Yet, when we quote Solomon
 - 2. we do not quote a king, a political leader, but
 - a) we quote a preacher/prophet/philosopher.
 - b) We quote a poet.
- C. Intriguingly, he introduced himself first as a preacher,
 - 1. then as the son of David,
 - 2. then as king in Jerusalem.

D. Read quotations from America's presidents in their shining moments and

1. you will hear spiritual wisdom, and
2. allusions and direct quotations from Scripture.
 - a) America does well when her presidents preach the Bible.
 - b) The Book of Ecclesiastes will prove my point.

E. We also will do our best when we

1. ponder wise words,
2. live by them, and
3. teach them to others.
 - a) We will do our best when we sound like a preacher,
 - b) not giving sermons when we talk to people, but
 - (1) giving wise sayings.

F. What then would a wise and wealthy preacher-king say to us?

II. Ecclesiastes 1.2 • The Supreme Vanity

**2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;
“Vanity of vanities[?] all is vanity.”**

A. What does the preacher want us to know?

B. He wants us to know the supreme or ultimate vanity.

1. What is the vanity of all vanities?
2. The fact that everything is vanity!
 - a) Nothing has meaning.
 - b) Nothing has profit.

C. Thirty-six times in the Book of Ecclesiastes Solomon used the word, “vanity.”

D. Why did he write such things?

1. This is where people misunderstand the Book of Ecclesiastes.

2. You have to read it in context.
 - a) Read the whole Book in one sitting, if you can.
 - b) If you do not know the context,
 - (1) you will have a hard time understanding him, and
 - (2) if you have a hard time understanding him,
 - (a) you will not understand the point about life of which he wrote.
 - (b) If you cannot read it all in one sitting,
 - i) at least read as much as you can in one sitting,
 - ii) then finish the next day or whenever.

III. Ecclesiastes 1.3 • What Do You Profit

3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?

- A. Look at your life strictly from under the sun.
- B. What profit is all your labor?
 1. You toil for decades.
 2. You toil to provide for your family.
 - a) You toil to retire.
 - b) You have a couple of decades, maybe a few, to enjoy retirement.
 - (1) Then you die.
 - (2) Is that all your life is?
- C. Why did you work all those years?
 1. Suddenly you die and what does all that labor mean to you then?
 2. You did great things,
 - a) you made mistakes,
 - b) only for it all to end in death:

20 “...[then] whose will those things be which you have provided?”

– Luke 12.20

IV. Ecclesiastes 1.4 • Man and the Earth

**4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes;
But the earth abides forever.**

A. Our generation will pass away then a new generation will inhabit the earth.

1. Do you know what that generation does?
2. The same things that our generation did, and
 - a) our generation did the same things that the previous generation did.
 - b) Each generation works as though it has some grand scheme to fulfill.
 - (1) Then that generation passes away.
 - (2) Does the new one consider what the older one’s labor meant?
 - (a) For all they did and for all we do,
 - (b) the same problems still exist!

B. While generations come and go,

1. the earth abides forever.
2. Something keeps giving every new generation that comes along,

**22 Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night.**

– Genesis 8.22

- a) Do any of the generations consider that they each vanish so quickly
- b) while the earth remains forever?
 - (1) Does that not say something about the generations?

(2) We seem to have a higher purpose than laboring a few decades.

(a) Is it possible that all our labor *on the earth under the sun*

(b) prepares us for another place *above the sun*?

V. Ecclesiastes 1.5–7 • The Earth Abides

**5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,
And hastens to the place where it arose.**

**6 The wind goes toward the south,
And turns around to the north;
The wind whirls about continually,
And comes again on its circuit.**

**7 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.**

A. The earth abides forever, but

1. it keeps doing over and over its ceaseless duties, even as
2. the endless generations perform their ceaseless duties over and over.

B. The sun rises,

1. the sun goes down,
2. only to reappear where it did the day before.

a) The wind goes south, then north,

- (1) whirling all over the earth,
- (2) only to return to where it began.

b) The water runs down the rivers

- (1) never filling the sea, but
- (2) somehow the water returns

(a) to the beginning of the rivers again.

(b) Why? What is the purpose?

C. What is all that about?

D. Does it mean anything?

1. The cycles of the earth are like the cycles of the generations.
 - a) Even as the sun, the wind, and the water repeat themselves,
 - b) so new generations repeat the labors of previous generations.
2. Does the following generation learn from the previous generation?

VI. Ecclesiastes 1.8 • Labor Fills Everything

**8 All things are full of labor;
Man cannot express it.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor the ear filled with hearing.**

A. Everything we do requires labor.

1. How can a person express the extensive labor
 - a) on the earth,
 - b) under the sun
 - c) by every generation?
2. How much labor
 - a) shall the human race exert tomorrow?
 - b) Can we find a way to measure it?

B. We labor for what we see, but

1. we can never see enough.
2. Can a person express all that the eye can see?

C. We labor for what we hear, but

1. we can never hear enough.
2. Can a person express all that the ear can hear?

VII. Ecclesiastes 1.9–11 What Is New?

9 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.
10 Is there anything of which it may be said,
“See, this is new”?
It has already been in ancient times before us.
11 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.**

A. Look at yesterday.

1. What happened yesterday will happen today.
2. What happens today will happen tomorrow.

B. Therefore, there is nothing new under the sun.

1. Can you find anything and say it is new,
2. that the earth has never seen *anything like it*?
 - a) There is nothing, because
 - b) it happened yesterday,
 - (1) it even happened in ancient times!

C. Do you challenge that idea?

1. You challenge it because
2. you do not know the former things.
 - a) How many acts happened worldwide in the centuries before us?
 - b) Take the activities on earth today and
 - (1) they appear somewhere in the past.
 - (2) Consider some of the amazing things past generations did:

D. Here is the thing, the generation after us

1. will not know or
2. remember what we did.
 - a) The generation after that one

b) will forget what that one did, ad infinitum.

Exhortation:

I. So then, what profit does a man have in all his labor under the sun?

- A. Who will know about our labor just a few years from now?
- B. Will our labor change the way this generation or the next generation lives?

II. What are we doing here?

- A. What is our purpose in all the labor we put out?
- B. What do we hope to accomplish?

III. It seems that we have no profit from all our labor.

- A. However, there is an event coming that answers the question of verse 3:

**3 What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?**

- B. Do you want to know the answer Solomon gives?
- C. Keep listening and we will find out what event answers the question.

IV. There is nothing new under the sun.

- A. We come up with new inventions, but
 - 1. man remains the same.
 - a) We do the same good things and
 - b) we do the same evil things.
 - 2. Man is man no matter what that generation does.
- B. However, that is looking at life from under the sun,
 - 1. not from above the sun.
 - 2. God can make new things.
 - a) Man labors in vain.
 - b) God does nothing in vain.

(1) We try to make things new.

(2) God can make you new.

C. You have tried endless ways to make yourself better, but

1. in Second Corinthians 5,

2. the Holy Spirit revealed the place of renewal:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

– 2 Corinthians 5.17

a) You want to experience something new

b) like you have never experienced before?

(1) Submit to Jesus Christ and

(2) let him renew your life.

(a) You will then find your purpose in life.

(b) You will then have meaning, value, and aim.