Vanity of Vanities

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18
Vanity of Vanities

Text:

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18,

1. The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
3. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
4. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.
5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.
6. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.
7. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.
8. All things are full of labour: man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
9. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be: and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.
10. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.
11. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.
12. I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
13. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore
travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.
14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
15. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.
16. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.
17. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
18. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Introduction:

I. The name of the book of Ecclesiastes means “the Preacher.”

A. Solomon is the author of the book.

1. He is the only immediate son of David that was king in Jerusalem. (Ecclesiastes 1:1)

2. It seems that Ecclesiastes was written near the end of Solomon’s life.

3. He had become more aware of the folly of his sinfulness.

4. The book of Ecclesiastes is written largely from Solomon’s viewpoint as he speaks of the emptiness or vanity of many things that he had once thought important.
5. The word *vanity* means *empty, unsatisfactory* or *something transitory*.

B. Ecclesiastes is largely a book of repentance.

1. Solomon showed earthly things to be “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

2. We learn from Solomon that neither the world nor sin can provide true happiness.

3. In fact, these things tend to make us miserable!

4. True happiness is found in God alone.
   a. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

II. Ecclesiastes is an inspired part of our Bible in which Solomon recorded his own folly and shame, the bitterness of his disappointment, and the life lessons that he had learned.

   A. If Solomon is “the preacher,” and if “Ecclesiastes” is his sermon, then his theme is, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”
Commentary:

This Earthly Life Is Vain

Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

I. The Book of Ecclesiastes is the preacher’s sermon.

   A. The book is one continued speech or sermon from Solomon.

   B. Solomon is called by several different names in the Bible.

      1. God called him “Jedidiah.”

         a. 2 Samuel 12:25, And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

      2. “Lemuel” was another name by which he was called.

         a. Proverbs 31:1, The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

      3. He was also possibly called “Agur.”

         a. Proverbs 30:1, The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,
C. He identified himself as the son of David.

1. He might have mentioned David out of the great honor and respect he had for this good man.

2. The mention of David could have been from guilt being a descendant of such a good man and yet having lived in folly.

II. The expression “vanity of vanities, all is vanity” summed up Solomon’s earthly life.

A. What can man take with him from his labor “under the sun?”

1. Paul wrote, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” (1 Timothy 6:7)

2. Solomon said, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.” (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

3. This shows that a man can have no profit of all his labour under the sun.

4. He works hard to gain something only to die and leave it behind.

5. Soon death overtakes an entire generation.

B. Solomon said the “earth abideth for ever.”

1. We know now by God’s revelation that, “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the
which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10)

Things Continually Change, Yet Remain The Same

Ecclesiastes 1:5-8, The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labour: man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

I. Solomon pictured man as being like nature, changing quickly but continually remaining the same.

II. The runner is quick to find the course and stay on it.

A. Psalm 19:5-6 pictures the sun in just that fashion. “Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.”

B. One generation comes and another goes just as the sun is quick to repeat its circuit.

1. A generation comes and another goes just as the sun is quick to repeat its circuit.
2. They are one moment at the noon of prosperity and then quickly cut off at the midnight of life.

III. Solomon used the wind to picture the instability and restless state of man.

A. Man attempts to fill his belly with stuff and it satisfies no more than being filled with the wind.

1. The frailty of human life is seen, as man’s life is quickly gone just as the wind passing over the earth.

2. Age after age passes, just as rivers flowing into the sea.

3. Just as the sea is never full with the rivers that flow into it, so the mind of man is never satisfied with all the riches and honour he gains on earth.

IV. Solomon pictured the unsatisfying nature of all these things: vanity of vanities.

A. Man has no profit in these things “under the sun.”

There Is Nothing New Under The Sun

Ecclesiastics 1:9-11, The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be: and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

I. Things of this world are very fatiguing to those that have them.
A. Solomon’s goal was to cause us to understand the unsatisfying nature of all things under the sun.

1. “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.”

2. Man searches for something new continually.

3. The eye and the ear are never satisfied because they see and hear the same kinds of things over and over again.

4. When Solomon said, “There is no new thing under the sun,” he likely referred to things of nature.

B. Solomon asked the people to name any new thing under the sun.

1. We now know that there are many “new things.”

2. Especially, there are many things that are “new” spiritually.

3. There is: (1) the new covenant, (2) the new commandment, (3) the new and living way, (4) a new name, and (5) the New Testament.

4. Solomon said that the reason that some things appear new is because man does not remember what has already been done.

5. He said things that are and things that are to come will soon be forgotten.
Solomon’s Situation and His Studies

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

I. Solomon showed that things that are normally thought to make a person happy do not.

A. Solomon realized that no man could make right the wrongs of the world.

1. Surely being king would make a man happy.

2. However, that was not the case.

   a. Solomon was “king over Israel in Jerusalem.”

   b. Yet he described his life as vanity of vanities.

   c. He was a wise king over “a wise and understanding nation.” (Deuteronomy 4:6)
B. Solomon gave his mind and ability to search out wisdom.

1. Solomon searched for wisdom concerning “all things that are done under heaven.”

2. His desire was that he might be able to judge between right and wrong.

3. He realized that men often want to know about things that are none of their business.

II. The search for this wisdom brought Solomon weariness to the flesh, and pain and uneasiness to his mind.

A. Solomon said, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity, a striving after the wind and a feeding on wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

B. The deficiencies in the human race are so numerous, they cannot be understood nor counted. Only God can correct the wrongs of the world.

C. Isaiah wrote, “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” (Isaiah 43:16)

D. Solomon looked into his own heart and realized that he had much wisdom and knowledge of the world and of mankind.

1. He had become a great man in the world.
2. It was said of Jesus, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42)

3. Solomon delighted in obtaining more and more knowledge, but then he “perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.”

4. In much wisdom there is much grief:
   a. In the effort it takes to gain it,
   b. In how easy it is to forget it,
   c. In the folly of man as learns by it.

5. This increased knowledge brought Solomon sorrow.

III. There is a wisdom that brings the result that Solomon described.

   A. There is also true wisdom.

   1. “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then
peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” (James 3:13-18)

Question:

Have you focused your life on what is really important? Are you serving the Lord?
Questions

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

1. Ecclesiastes is the words of the __________________________,
_________________ of _______________ in _______________.  (NIV)

2. “_____________________!  ____________________!” says the 
______________.  “_________________________!  Everything is 
______________.”  (NIV)

3. Do you agree that everything is utterly meaningless?  
______________  Give reasons for your answer.  ______________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

4. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under 
the sun?  (NIV) _________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

5. What is the meaning of the word forever in verse 4?  Will the 
earth truly remain eternally?  ______________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

6. How did the permanency of the earth contribute to Solomon’s 
feeling of futility?  _______________________________________

______________________________________________________
7. How did Solomon’s observations of the repetitive movements of the sun and wind contribute to his futility? ____________________________________________

8. Do all streams flow into the sea? ______________ What about the Jordan River? ______________

9. What is the place from which streams come? ______________

10. Why is it that the sea is never full even though all streams flow into it? ______________

11. Do you feel that all things are more wearisome than words can tell? ______________
12. Explain how and why the eye never has enough of seeing nor the ear its fill of hearing. (NIV)

13. "What has been will be ____________, What has been ______________ will be ______________ ______________." (NIV) Does this bother you? ______________ If not, why do you think it bothered Solomon? ______________

14. Is there really nothing new under the sun? ______________ If there are some new things under the sun, name some of them. ____

15. Are the statements in verses 4-9 absolute truths to which there are zero excepts or are they general statements used by Solomon to emphasize, illustrate his point?
16. “There is no _______________ of _______________ of ______________, and even those who are _______________ to _______________ will not be _______________ by those who _______________. (NIV)

17. How many people will remember you 150 years from now? _______________ Is this important to you? _______________
Why or why not? _______________

18. Solomon said, “I _______________ _______________ to _______________ and to _______________ by _______________ all that is _______________ under _______________.” (NIV)

19. Did Solomon succeed in exploring “all that is done under heaven?” _______________

20. What heavy burden has God laid on men? (NIV) _______________
21. Are all things that are done under the sun meaningless, a futile chasing after wind? Why or why not? Why did Solomon make this statement? ____________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

22. Is a study of abnormal psychology useless? _____________ (see verse 17). Explain your answer. __________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

23. How are wisdom and sorrow, knowledge and grief related? Do we believe wisdom and knowledge will make our lives better? _______________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

24. What are some twisted things that cannot be straightened out? Consider physical, social, spiritual applications of this question. __
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________

25. What might a psychiatrist make of Solomon’s attitude? ______
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________