**August 2, 2025 Living Well: Reality of Life Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14; 2:18-23 Luke 12:13-21**

***“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Ecclesiastes 1:2***

***“Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:13***

**This month, our series focuses on Living Well as Christians**. The preacher in Ecclesiastes and the parables of Jesus offer valuable guidance on how to live faithfully. One key question raised by the preacher is: What is the most important thing in life? Is accumulating wealth inherently wrong? Why did Jesus call the man who wanted to plan for his wealth a fool? **Ultimately, what is the main purpose of life?**

The question that Ecclesiastes aims to answer is how to live well in a fleeting, uncertain world. The answer is not merely to follow God and expect everything to become clear, enjoyable, and easy. Christians face the same broken world as everyone else. Therefore, we need to learn how to navigate life in a way that allows us to thrive and achieve our ultimate goal.

This morning, as we focus on Ecclesiastes, we can easily relate to the frustrations expressed by “the Preacher.” He has explored nearly every avenue in search of purpose and meaning in life, only to find himself feeling empty. His perspective seems overly pessimistic, and in this opening poem, he conveys a sense of hopelessness. What is the ultimate result of human toil? Nothing!

In our text, The Preacher affirms that everything under the sun is vanity! He repeats this phrase five times in the opening quote: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) and throughout many parts of the book.

The word translated as “vanity” appears thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. It encompasses a wide range of meanings **but literally signifies vapor or breath**. Everything is like a vapor that you just can’t catch and you can't hold on to. It’s like the breath that fogs up a window when you get close and exhale deeply; it only lasts for a moment. The Preacher compares everything in life to that fleeting breath. “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!” remarked David! (Psalm 39:5).

But its meaning goes beyond that. It is used to speak of things that are frustrating, perplexing, and meaningless. Yes, life is brief and fleeting, but it’s also really difficult to understand. It is confusing and stressful. Oftentimes, if we’re being honest, it feels pointless. The transmission goes out in one car, so we buy a new one and immediately get into an accident. We get ahead on mortgage payments only to have a medical emergency. Life can frustrate us like that.

Does this mean his pessimism has won? Does he think life’s negatives outweigh the positives?

In verse 3 the Preacher asks the central question of this passage:

“What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” Ecclesiastes 1:3

The Preacher uses the word “toil” twenty-four times. It refers to hard labor, suggesting anxious or even miserable work. It is often translated as “trouble.” But he provides an important clarification about the context he’s reflecting on. “**Under the sun” appears twenty-nine times and signifies human life without regard for God**. It represents a short life in a fallen world, often filled with frustration. And what is the result? What is the reward for all our hard work? The implied answer is nothing.

**It is actually the same point Jesus makes in Matthew 16:26:** “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” The profit is nothing. Remove God from the picture, view everything from an atheistic perspective, and you are left with a pointless, meaningless existence – filled with frustration.

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis probes this point: “Most people, if they had learned to look into their hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world…He mentions our deep desires for love, travel, and learning. But, in the end, Lewis continues…There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality.”

**So how do we cope with this reality? What are we supposed to do considering all the confusion and frustration we face**? **Hear what Jesus said, “Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.**” (Luke 12:13).

The quest for life's meaning begins with an honest evaluation of our purpose. We should not sugarcoat reality. Our lives are not solely defined by our possessions; rather, we should act as if everything we have belongs to God. We must be generous with God's gifts—in other words, be "rich toward God"—to avoid the fate of the rich fool. As Jesus said, “This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” Being rich toward God doesn’t end when someone writes our obituary, and people remember us with either fondness or contempt, then turn the page, but in the generous activities while we are still living!

We are not in a hopeless situation, as the Preacher suggests, if we follow Christ’s teachings. Through Him, we find hope in our redemption. The resurrection assures us that our efforts are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58) and dispels doubts about the afterlife mentioned in Ecclesiastes. While the Preacher claimed that nothing is remembered (Ecclesiastes 1:11), Jesus assures us in John 11:25-26 that believers will never die. Without this belief, the search for meaning will leave you feeling discontent, which is the very hopelessness the Preacher addresses.

In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, the Preacher summarizes how to navigate a world filled with vanity: we should fear God and keep His commandments, as this applies to everyone. There is nothing wrong with working hard and being rewarded with a good harvest; however, the rich fool sinned by failing to acknowledge God with humility. **The truth is, life without Christ is ultimately vanity.**