

An Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 15, 2021

If you would, open your Bibles with me to a new book of the Bible, it's a book that we haven't studied before. And that is the book of Ecclesiastes. So if you would, open your Bibles with me this morning to the book of Ecclesiastes, which is actually in the middle of your Bible, it's right after the book of Proverbs, if you're not familiar with it; so if you just open to the center, and maybe turn a little to the right. As you're doing that, if you are joining us for the first time today, I want to mention that you've come at a good time because we're starting a new series here at Grace. It's actually the eighth one we've done so far, if you can believe that. This will be the eighth book of the Bible we've studied in our time together because we tried to go through material quickly as a church, since we're still pretty new. We're trying to go through as much of the Bible as we can in a short amount of time. And as we've done it, we've come to what might be the most unusual book in the Bible. And you'll see that as we read it. So if you would read Ecclesiastes chapter one with me, it says this.

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

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity,” What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun? A generation goes in a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. Also, the sun rises and sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again. Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns. All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done, is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, “See this, it is new”? Already, it has existed for ages which were before us. There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also the latter things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.

I, the preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

I'll stop the reading there before I make you more depressed. I would say after reading it, that's a pretty gloomy way to start a book. And then that's a pretty sad thing to read because that's what Ecclesiastes is. It is a sad book.

Just to say a few words about it, the main point of this passage is found in the first couple of words, when it says in verse one, ‘The words of the preacher’ because the word for preacher in Hebrew is *qohelet*, which means a preacher or a teacher, or it also means a philosopher. Which is a good way to translate this word, because philosophy is a search for truth. It's a quest for the meaning of life, and Solomon is doing that here. And what he's saying is that I can't find it. He's searching for the meaning of life and is coming up empty, which is making him miserable. You're just reading his misery here in the first chapter. Have you guys ever heard the joke, “How many philosophers does it take to change a light bulb? It takes two because it takes one to change it and the other one to ponder the meaning of the light bulb”? And here, Solomon is pondering the meaning of his life; and this is what he's coming up with. The Midrash, or the rabbi's commentary on the Old Testament, said that Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. It said he wrote Song of Solomon at the beginning when he was young, he wrote proverbs in the middle when he was sort of wise, and then he wrote Ecclesiastes at the end when he was old. And his point in doing that is that he was falling into despair because he thought his life had been lived in vain. He lived his life without God, he lived it for sin, and this is the conclusion he came to. If you notice, he says here in the chapter that there is no advantage to life in verse three; that's a pretty awful thing to say. Then he says all things are wearisome in verse eight because they're so boring; they're so monotonous. The sun keeps rising and setting, wind keep swirling along. There's nothing new under the sun in verse nine; life goes on like it always has making it grievous at the end of all this. It brought him nothing but pain because of his sin. We'll talk about Solomon's life in a minute, but if you remember his story, you'll know that it ended badly. It was a tragedy of the highest order because he turned his back on God.

Ecclesiastes, as you read it here, it's one of the strangest books in the Bible because the message is not very clear at first. Because obviously, all is not vanity. There is a meaning to life, but not if you live in sin, and that's the point of the book. If you sin, all you get is vanity because your life will be lived for nothing. Solomon's life was a testimony to that. It's been said that in the book of Job, God showed Job, the godliest man on earth, that he was a sinner. And in the book of Ecclesiastes, he showed Solomon, the wisest man on earth, that he was a fool because he lived his life for the wrong things. It's a very sobering thing to say. Several years ago, someone asked 250 famous scholars the question, “What is the meaning of life?? And they all said, “We don't know” because they were lost. E. E. Cummings, Leonard Bernstein, Aldous Huxley, all these brilliant minds, and none of them could tell you what the life was all about because they were lost. That's what Solomon is struggling with here.

I think we all can relate to this at times, life can seem pretty vain, even for a Christian. So for example, I mean, how many of you have ever wondered, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” We've always wondered that. Why do little old ladies die from cancer? Why do babies get sick? Why do children suffer and starve in countries like Africa? Why do catastrophes happen? Why do natural disasters occur? Why do evil men get ahead? Why, why, why, why? The questions keep coming. And the good news is that God has an answer for that; He knows the truth, but not if you don't know Him.

And that's the point of this. There are no answers for that if you're living like this because all you have is darkness. Because bad things happen to good people and lost people; they don't know why. Babies die, they have no answer for that. One scholar said that it's all about the survival of the fittest anyway, so if a baby dies, they're just taking away from our resources, it's okay. That's a horrible thing to say, but that's the conclusion you come to if there is no God. And that's the kind of thing Solomon is wrestling with here. Now, in all fairness to him, he doesn't stay that way because there are glimpses of hope in this book, and we're going to talk about that. And he does have very positive things to say about the Lord, but he just goes back and forth in here. He's a basket case, because that's what sin turns you into. Which is something that we need to take to heart today.

You know, the reason I wanted to talk to you about this book is because Chilliwack, you're watching it become sort of a sinful place right now, right? You're seeing it become very vain. It wasn't always that way; it used to be pretty boring, I was told, but not anymore. It's becoming very worldly. I told you before way back in February, the Progress published an article that said that the city of Chilliwack sold 360 million dollars' worth of real estate. In the month of February alone, two quarter billion dollars just pumped into our economy. And at one time, the price of housing was going up \$20,000 a week, which means that all that money is being poured into people's lives, and it's turning a lot of them vain. They're chasing after the things that Solomon did. They want to buy a bigger house, or a bigger car, a bigger boat, they want to get nicer toys, or nicer clothes or nicer jewelry, so they can keep up with the Joneses. They don't even like the Joneses. The Joneses are not nice people, but they want to keep up with them. In fact, I've talked to people in our church who have told me that this is such a problem that their work has almost consumed, and they don't have time for anything else but to work. And I've talked to other ones who say the same thing about their hobbies because they're constantly gone. They're always going on trips somewhere because the money has given us itchy feet. It's making us run, run, run all the time. Go, go, go. We don't know where, we're just going. Which is so interesting to watch because we live in farmland. By all accounts, we should live in a very peaceful part of the world with all the mountains and rivers and valleys, but there's no peace here anymore. I don't see peaceful people in Chilliwack. We're all in such a hurry. And if you're not careful, Solomon says it can make you come to the end of your life and regret it. All the rush and hurry and push in this world can make you come to your last days and repeat the lines of this book. It was all vanity. Just a striving after the wind. And you don't want to do that today. On the shelves in my office, there's a plaque that says this, "Only one life will soon be passed. Only what is done for Christ will last." And I have it up there to remind me that when I'm in such a rush, and when I'm in such a hurry, there's only one thing that matters at the end of the day, and that is Jesus, amen? All this other stuff doesn't matter. It's gonna burn. It'll puff away like smoke like we saw just a moment ago. So you want to pour your life into Him.

I'll never forget the last funeral I did in the states before moving to Canada, because it was for a guy I didn't know, someone in the church just asked me to do it for him. And when I showed up, there were only four people there. This man had lived his entire life and died, and there were only four people to come to his funeral because he had wasted it. As I talked to them and learned about his life, he spent it

all on alcohol. And I remember thinking at that moment, I don't want to die that way. God, please give me something better than this. That's the message of this book. Solomon is trying to encourage you to seek something better than a life like that.

I want to talk to you about that this morning by giving you some introductions to the book of Ecclesiastes. So if you're taking notes today, this is what our sermon is going to be about. We're going to look at several introductions to the book of Ecclesiastes, because even though this is an ancient book, the message is still relevant today. It's thousands of years old, and we're still dealing with the same problems. People today still try to waste their lives. They try to spend it on things that don't matter. And the scary thing is, that's what lost people do, but not Christians. That's how unbelievers act, but not us. Our life has meaning and it's not to buy a newer car, it's to live for something greater than that. And that's what we're going to discuss in this book. I mean, nothing makes me sadder as a pastor than to watch this town get richer and to see our people forget that. It's discouraging because they think the money is going to give them something that they don't already have, and it won't. It never does. You have all you need in Christ. In fact, this is one of our elders' biggest jobs, because we're constantly having to tell people don't look over there, look over here. Don't chase after that, open up your Bibles, pray, go to church, spend time with other believers. And that's what this book is trying to encourage you to do. So let's talk about that with three introductions to the book of Ecclesiastes.

The first one is an introduction to the author. The first introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes that we're going to talk about today is an introduction to the author because you can't really understand the book until you understand who wrote it. So we're going to start there. And we've already talked about it a little bit, but if you look in the opening words, this is who wrote it, it says this, it says, "The words of the preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem." And then if you want to see another reference to him, you can look down in verse 12, where it says, "I, the preacher has been king over Israel and Jerusalem. And I've set my mind to seek and explore wisdom." And then down in chapter 2:9, here's another reference to him, he says, "Then I became great, and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me." I read those references to you because you can see the word "I" in there because the author is referring to himself. And all of this is one big reference to Solomon, the son of David. To be fair, there were other sons of David in the Bible, and there were other kings in Jerusalem, but he's the only guy that fit both descriptions. It mentions him seeking wisdom and knowledge. It mentions all his wealth and splendor later in the book. So it's talking about this guy.

Just to say a few words about him. If you remember before Solomon's time, Israel was led by the judges. It was ruled by men like Samson and Gideon, guys like that, who were not very good men. They were pretty rough. Samson actually was a little more like a Neanderthal than a judge. He was kind of like a caveman. So Israel wanted a king, you can understand why. So the Lord gave them one and He gave them Saul, who turned out to be rotten. He was really nothing better than a judge, one of the judges. Then came David, who was a great king, the greatest King Israel ever had. And then He gave them this guy, Solomon. He was the third one in line, and he was a little bit of both. He had a little bit of his father

and grandfather in him. I've heard it said that Saul had no heart for God, David had a whole heart for God, and Solomon had half a one.

And that's what you see in his life. He had some bright spots in his career, along with some pretty dark ones. If you recall the story, you remember David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then he married her. They had a son who died in infancy, died as a child. And then they had another one named Solomon, that's this guy. And his name actually means peace, because that's what David wanted him to bring to Israel. David was a man of war; he had fought his entire life, and he wanted his child to have a better life, so he named him accordingly. And as he began to reign, 1 Kings says that the Lord said to Solomon, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you." You can imagine if you're starting off as King, what would you want? Want stronger borders, want a unified Empire? Solomon asked for wisdom. It's quite a request. The Lord said, "I'll give you that. And I'll give you what you haven't asked for riches and honor and all these things." And the rest of the Old Testament tells you what that looked like. And we'll just give a quick overview here. Concerning His wisdom, it says that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and 1,000 songs. There's only 915 verses in the book of Proverbs, so that means he gave you way more than that. That's all that we know about. Concerning his riches, it says that he had 1,000 women in his court; he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. We'll talk about that in a moment. But what that means is that Solomon had enough money to feed 1,000 people a day and their kids. It kind of boggles the mind. Can you imagine sitting down at the table with that many people? I'm sure they all got along. Concerning his projects, it also says he built the temple for the Lord that took 150,000 men seven years to build. We have a lot of building going on in Chilliwack right now, but I'm guessing if any of you took seven years to finish the project, you would be fired. And I'm guessing if you had 150,000 men to oversee, they would revolt. But he did all; that is quite a guy. He also put 100,000 talents of gold into it, which comes to about 4,000 tons. The US Treasury currently has about 7,000 tons sitting in its main vault, Federal Reserve Bank. Solomon put half of that in the temple, which sounds like an impressive life, doesn't it? The guy was something special, and that's what led to his downfall. All the gold turned his head away from God because it made him do terrible things like marry all those women. Some people have wondered, why doesn't God condemn Solomon's polygamy in the Bible? Why didn't He say something about it? Well, He does because He shows you what it did to him, it destroyed him. Because his wives led him into idolatry. There's a hill right across from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where they believe Solomon's wives might have sacrificed to their gods, and the interesting thing about it is that you can see it from the temple. Meaning that if they did sacrifice there, Solomon could have prayed to his God while watching his wives pray to theirs, and he never stopped them. He never told him to cut it out. Instead, he actually joined them.

Which is what Ecclesiastes is about because in this book, Solomon says, "You need to learn a lesson from that and don't repeat my mistake. I blew it. I ruined my life." And so don't do the same thing today. We've all heard parents tell their kids "Do what I say but don't do what I do." How many parents in the room say that? Solomon is saying that in the book because he's reflecting on his life, and he's saying, "I'm trying to turn back the hands of time, and go back and fix it, and I can't. I'm not able. So I'm just

asking you to learn a lesson from that. Don't go down this road." If you think about it, there's very few of us, who will ever do what Solomon did here. I mean, this guy, not only was he physically successful, but he wrote Scripture. His name is mentioned in the Bible as the wisest of all men, which means that if he could fall this far, you could do it too. So we need to take that seriously today. Listen, friends, you can be saved and still ruin your life, can't you? You can be a Christian and still blow it. It happens all the time. Paul calls them carnal Christians in 1 Corinthians 3. They are Christians who just keep going back to carnal things. They're saved. They cast the carnal things aside, but they just keep getting taken up in them. He also calls them wretched in Romans 7. He says, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Because they keep liking death. Which is what you see happening today in our town. I can't tell you how many people I've seen retire and just disappear from church because they work and work and work and they save and save their money, and they come to the magical age of 65, and then they vanish. You never see them again because they march off into eternity on a golf course. Or you meet other people who do the same thing with their jobs because they try and try and try for the promotion. They work and work and work only to disappear when it comes because they get swamped in the company, swallowed up by it. What Solomon is saying here is "I did the same thing and it was stupid." He's saying, "I lived my life that way, and it was dumb because what's the promotion going to give you in eternity? What's it going to do for you in the next life?" Solomon says you get one shot at life, you get one chance to make it count and there are no do overs. There's no rewind button on the movie. Hebrew says it's destined for man to die once and after that to face a judgment. That means there's one death, one judgment and that's it. You need to be Wise with how you spend it. You need to be smart about your life.

I grew up in a place where this was really impressed on me because my grandparents lived nearby. One blessing of having grandparents nearby is because you get to watch them die and grow old. And when I would visit them, we would often sit on the porch every night in the rocking chairs, telling stories and drinking sweet tea like they do in the south. They would just rock and rock and rock and sip their tea and talk about the Great Depression. They talked about World War Two. They talked about sharecropping and cotton farming in West Tennessee, because they couldn't do it again. The reason they talk like that is because their life was almost over, they couldn't go back. And I remember as a child thinking, "I wonder what I'm going to say when I'm in my rocking chair? Am I going to be happy then with the things I'm doing now?? Friends, this is serious stuff. Because I'll tell you what you won't say when you're in the rocking chair, you won't say, "I wish I'd made more money." That will not come out of your mouth. And you won't say, "I wish I'd retired sooner so I could play more golf," that's dumb. You're gonna say, "I wish I'd done more for the Lord." You're going to say, "I wish I'd spent more of my life in His service." And so you need to be doing it now. You prepare for that day by the things you do today, which leads us to another point to consider in the book.

The first one is an introduction to the author, the author is Solomon, one of the greatest kings of Israel, the wisest and most powerful one who had it all, but he had nothing. It's a very tragic life. Which brings us to the next point to talk about and that's the theme of the book.

A second introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes is an introduction to the theme of the book, which is vanity. As we've already seen and talked about, the main theme of this book is that a life lived without God is vain or futile. It doesn't amount to anything. And you can see this again in these first couple of verses when Solomon says this, it says,

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

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity,”

It says the word vanity five times in there. He's not stuttering, because in the Hebrew language, they didn't have a word for more or most like we do. So if they wanted to express that idea, they just repeated the word. Remember, the Bible says God is holy, holy, holy; it means he's the holiest. Well, Solomon says my life was vanity, vanity, vanity. It was the vanity-est; it was a vain life. In fact, he uses this word 37 times in the book, it's the Hebrew word *hebel*, which is translated meaningless or fruitless. In some of your Bible, some of your translations say meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless; that's a good way to render it. Again, this is a man trying to find the meaning or purpose of life, and this is his conclusion. But the word, just to explain it some more, it could it could also mean air or something that blows around in the wind. Because that's what a vain life is. It's just a plastic bag floating with nothing to land on. Which is how so many people live. One commentator calls this soap bubbles, which is great for the illustration you saw a moment ago, because the idea is that a life lived without God just rises up and pops like a soap bubble. In fact, just so you can see how Solomon uses the word, let me show you a few times where it's found in the book. If you look in chapter 2:9, here's one of the ways Solomon uses this. He says,

Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was [and there's your word] vanity and striving after the wind.

There you actually see the connection between wind and vanity in here. Because Solomon mentioned several things that are vain to him, and the biggest one was pleasure. He says, “I did not withhold from my heart any pleasure,” whether it be food or drink, or whether it be games or parties or alcohol. He actually mentions alcohol in the passage. He says, “I tried all of it. I chased after everything, and what was the conclusion? It was vanity. Because every time I thought I found something to satisfy me, I didn't. Every time I thought I found something that would make me happy, yeah, I was happy for a while, then I was bored again. And then I was happy for a while, then I was bored again. Then I was happy for a while, then I was bored again.” That is 2021, isn't it? That is the world you live in today. People just try not to be bored. Solomon says you can't; you'll never fix that problem. Then if you look

in chapter 5:10, he mentions this word another way. In 5:10 he says, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.” So Solomon says the same thing could be said about money. Because all those long hours at the office, all those late nights at the desk are nothing either. Because as soon as you get paid, you spend it. As soon as you get a few dollars in the bank, it's gone like that. Or you put it in the bank, and you worry about it, right? It never satisfies and in chapter 6:8, there's another way he uses this word, he says,

For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living? What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after the wind.

Now, that's a little bit mysterious there, what he's telling you, but what he's saying is that wisdom is vanity as well. He means worldly wisdom, or secular wisdom, not the wisdom of God, but the wisdom of the scientists and philosophers. Because he says, “what the eye sees is better than what the soul desires.” In other words, it looks good to have a big library, it looks really wonderful to have all those books, but what's the point? You can't read them. And even if you read them, you won't remember. It'll go one in one ear and come out the other because it's all vanity. And we can talk about other ways he uses this word because he uses it in reference to his position and his power. He uses it in reference his health and his strength because Solomon ate right and he went to the gym every day, but he woke up one day and he was old. That's another lesson for British Columbia: he got wrinkles, it happens to all of us. But the idea in the book is it's just a bunch of soap bubbles. All these things: pleasure, money, wisdom, health, it just rises up and pops, so you don't want to live your life for that. You don't spend all your days on these types of things. I don't know if you've ever watched children chase soap bubbles, which you got to see that a little bit here, but it's a silly task, isn't it? Because you spend all this work to catch one, and then what? It's the same way with chasing the things of this world. I remember playing sports in college and seeing these young men that were wonderful athletes, I had a roommate on the basketball team, he could jump three feet off the ground. You know what? He's old now. Doesn't matter.

Take the issue of pleasure for a moment, how many of you know someone who spends all their time watching ballgames or going on trips? I know some men that are in in nursing homes, they can't go on trips anymore. It's all vain. You have to spend your life on something better than that. Solomon says I've searched the world over and found there's nothing better than this: God is the only one who can satisfy, nothing else will do.

If you look, we'll talk about that in a moment, but if you look in 2:24, he says it this way. He says,

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I've seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

And that's the lesson here, is that no matter what you do, you will never find peace and enjoyment if you don't find it in God. It doesn't matter how high you climb on the scale, it doesn't matter how successful you are at work, it doesn't matter how much money you make, or how much earthly pleasures there are, it won't do you any good without God. You have to have that stamped in your brain. You have to have it burned in your mind. Solomon's actually been called the Great Paradox of Scripture because he forgot this. He knew the truth and he forgot. He's also been called the Great Riddle of the Bible because people can't figure out how could someone who could say such amazing things, live this way? But friends, that's a warning to all of us not to do the same.

I don't know if you've ever read *Pilgrim's Progress* before, but if you have, you'll remember that as Pilgrim was on his journey to the Celestial City, he came into a place called Vanity Fair, which was full of people that just wanted to party all the time. According to Bunyan, they just wanted to sit around and lust and lie and cheat on each other, and so Pilgrim turned them away. And as a result, they attacked him for it. They swore to him and threw filth on him, but he held to his guns. And friends, you're gonna have to do the same thing because John Bunyan was right, this world is a Vanity Fair. So you're going to have to learn how to say no to some things.

And that brings us to one more point to consider this morning. Just one more introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes here. The first one, just to review these other ones, the first one is an introduction to the author; and the author was Solomon. The second one's an introduction to the theme, which is vanity, because that's what Solomon had become; this wise man became a fool. And he started doing nothing but partying all day, living in Vanity Fair. Which would be discouraging, that would be a very depressing thing to say if it wasn't for the last thing to talk about. And that is a conclusion to this book. If you're taking notes, one more introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes, is a conclusion of the book, and that is that you need to return to God. Which means that if you've done all of this and chased after vanity, and spent your life on these foolish things, that's okay, because the solution is to come back to Christ. Ecclesiastes would be a very discouraging book if it wasn't for the end of it. Because if you look at the end, Solomon says this to wrap up his thoughts, he says in verse 13, Ydean called this the punch line earlier, I love that, this is the punch line of the book,

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

When Solomon mentions a conclusion here, he's referring to the conclusion of the book, or the conclusion of this issue. This is where you find the meaning of life. This is where you answer the problem of vanity, you find it in fearing the Lord. Which means you do it in respecting Him or honoring Him. The word fear doesn't refer to terror as much as it refers to honouring someone because this was Solomon's problem. He stopped honouring God with his life. He did it at one point, and he quit. So in order to fix that, he says, "I have to go back to that now because He will bring every act to judgment."

That means He will hold you accountable for your sins, and you have to live with that in mind. One author said that Solomon ends his book by saying that you need to live with one foot on the earth and one foot in the grave, because that's where you're going. You're plunging into eternity, and you don't need to ignore that. That's what vain people do. Vain people live the way they do because they don't think about death. It never occurs to them. That's why they're so reckless. So in order to avoid that, Solomon says you have to put the grave ever before your mind. We saw those bubbles pop, and the illustration was that every life is going to pop like that. Well it's true. And the way to stop being vain is to remember it.

In fact, I just showed you how many times the word "vanity" is mentioned the book of Ecclesiastes. It might help to mention that the word "God" appears 75 times, more than twice as much. Because this is really the main theme of the book, Solomon says there's a God shaped hole in all of us. There's an eternity shaped void in our hearts that can only be filled by God. Money can't fill it, and neither can pleasure. Wisdom can do it, and neither can work. Neither can pride, or reputation, or promotions, or a thousand wives. You've got to think in your mind, the reason he kept marrying more women is because the other ones didn't satisfy you. You would think somewhere around number 563, he would have stopped. None of that will ever fill your empty soul. Only God can do that.

To say it another way, this is the hope you have in the book of Ecclesiastes, and that is that you have a God, friends. You have a God who will take you back. If you have chased after vain things and you have followed foolishness, you have a God is willing to receive you. Because He did that with Solomon. That's what you see here at the end of the book. Solomon turned his life around. Some people have wondered, you know, is Solomon saved or not? That's one of the big riddles that the scholars talk about. Was he actually a believer? I think he was because he said this. He came back to the Lord which means you're never too lost for God. You're never too far gone for Him. No matter how many steps you take away, it's one step back.

You may find yourself saying in chapter one "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But you don't have to stop there because you can go back to this. You can fear God. He says at the end of the book here, "this applies to every person" that means it applies to you; you can write your name in this passage. In fact, some of you might have heard this sermon and said, "You know, that's me pastor Jeremy. I mean, I am chasing after vanity right now. My life is full of it. I get up in the morning, and it's vanity, vanity, vanity, I go to bed at night. It's the same thing. So what do I do?" Well, the answer is you go back to God. That's how you fix it. You need to put all that junk on hold and make things right with Him. Others of you might be wondering, "Well, Pastor Jeremy, I haven't done that yet. I mean, I'm not chasing vanity, but I'm tempted to. I feel myself being pulled in that direction. How do I stop that?" You do the same thing. You need to resist it because it's all a lie. Only God can give you true peace and happiness.

Listen, friends, you can't love both God and money. Remember that? Jesus said that. Either you'll hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can't serve God and

mammon. The Bible also says, "The love of money is the root of all evil." It doesn't say money is evil, but the love of it is. The worship of it is because you can't worship two things at once. You got to pick sides. It also says that greedy people will not inherit the kingdom of God because their loyalties are divided. So the question is, which one will you choose? God or money. I hope that you choose God because He is a good master. He's a very kind Lord, and money's not. So will you make the right decision today?

In his commentary on the book of Ephesians, James Montgomery Boyce, tells a story of a philosopher from Europe who moved to America because he wanted to find truth, just like what we've been talking about. And he couldn't find it. For years he just kept reading and reading and he couldn't find anything, until someone gave him a copy of the Bible, which he thought was a joke. He thought that his friend was playing a trick on him, but he opened it up and read it. And when he did, he said, it turned his life around, because for the first time he said, "I found a God who truly knew everything about me; and I discovered that everything else was vanity. "

My friends, have you met that God today? Have you come into contact with Him? Because if you have, you'll say the same thing. And let me pray for you that you would. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning, Lord, swimming in deep waters in the mind of the wisest man who ever lived, acknowledging that we are too lowly for these things. And yet, at the same time, Lord, this is something we all need to remember. And that is, life is precious. It won't last forever here in this world; it'll last forever in heaven or hell, and which one we go to determines on how we behave here. So Lord, I pray for my friends this morning as we begin this series, that it would start turning our mind to better things. There's nothing wrong with working a job, we need to do that. And we need to take pleasure in life and go on trips and enjoy things. We don't need to get swept up in them. We're all guilty of this, Father. We're all prone to fixate on the things that are ever before our minds. So Lord, I pray that this book would jar us out of our apathy and shake us out of our spiritual indifference.

Thank You for these words of Solomon. They are mysterious to us, and as we dive into them, there'll be a lot of things we don't know, but they're so important for us today, Father. So I pray You would give us sober mindedness in this, give us a sense of reverence. May Christ be glorified as we dive deeper into His word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Father, and as we take the Lord's Supper, would this be used to imprint some of these lessons on our minds? In Christ's name, amen.