

Sermon Title: **“The Greatest of Vanities”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Supporting Text

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -[Luke 21:19](#)

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Vanity of Vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:1-4;16-18)

“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 does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.’

I said in my heart, ‘I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me (ie, David my dad), and my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.’ And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this

also is but a striving after the wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” -Ecclesiastes 1:1-4; 16-18

Solomon was king David’s son and gifted by God with great wisdom. It was during his reign Israel experienced the largest territorial possession along with building the Temple. It was also a time of great taxation, marginalization of the orphan, widow, and fatherless along with oppressing and expanding the gulf between the rich and poor. His reign saw the best of times and the worst. Writing in the later years of his life, he reflects on the point any of this was for him, and is for us today?

Vanity in the Hebrew refers to *breath*. *Vanity of Vanities* is a *word play* in which Solomon is illustrating breath leaving us and slowly fading away. Picture standing outside on a cold morning, and you exhale, watching your breath leave your lips and drift away slowly fading. No matter how much you may try, you cannot direct that breath nor herd it in any direction. *It is Vanity of Vanities.*

The case Solomon is making is that no matter how much we try, our breath of life is sourced from the Giver of Life, and it is impossible to attempt to steer it. It will never know fullness outside of Him. Nothing in this world can ever satisfy us as God alone can. His breath, or Spirit, is physical and spiritual life to us. It is He alone that gives us the power to live in Him for His Glory.

Reading the Bible, praying, community with fellow saints- all this strengthens that life within us. When we pursue anything else at the expense of this we experience loss and a sense of emptiness. This is why our witness for Jesus is so needed- *to Learn from Him, Live like Him, and Lead others to Him*. To do otherwise is like trying to lead our expelled breath back into us. And that, according to Solomon, is *vanity*.

II. The Veil Separating *Vanity* and *Life* (Luke 24:44-49)

“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ -Luke 24:44

In this threefold division of the writings that make up our Old Testament- the Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms, everything flows into the Person & Work of Jesus Christ. From this central point must all of the Scripture now flow out from. It is all about Jesus. In this division we see:

- 1) *The Law of Moses* (Genesis through Deuteronomy / Job): We understand God created us, showed us who He is, and invites us to do life with Him through Atonement (blood to cover sin). ***God’s love originates within Him.***
- 2) *The Prophets* (Include the historical books along with the Wisdom collections and all of the Major and Minor Prophetical writings): We understand the struggle to do life with

God is real and the up and down journey see's God faithful despite humanity's unfaithfulness. *God's love pursues us relentlessly.*

3) *Psalms*. The communion between God and His children through all of the seasons we go through in this life. *God's love carries us through everything we will go through in this life.*

“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’” -Luke 24:45-49

Now that Jesus has come, He is the key in which all of Scripture opens up for us. Luke notes this as a supernatural unveiling brings to His disciples. There is a process of opening I want to note, and I pray this encourages you in your witness to pray alongside your faithful representation of the Gospel in the lives of others.

*“But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.’” *But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it.* And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.” -Luke 9:44-45*

*“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. *For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*” -2*

Corinthians 3:12-18

No matter the length of time, transparency in effort, nor creativity in delivery, unless someone turns to Jesus the veil remains over the Truth of God's Word and it remains a message of foolishness to this world. And although the Disciples walked close to the greatest Teacher of all, there was a veil over seeing beyond what even Moses saw until Jesus' declaration on the Cross of, *It is Finished*, and the veil in the Temple separating the people from God's presence was torn (From top to bottom). Please, always remember this and labor in both declaration and demonstration, trusting the Spirit to do His work in His timing. Just be faithful to give Jesus your Yes!

For, it is the Spirit of God which leads the breath, or soul within us into the Presence of God through the Son wherein alone is *life abundant*.

III. Reconciled Breath (Romans 5:1-11)

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” -Romans 5:1-5

The moment we place faith in Jesus for forgiveness for our sins, we are fully saved and positionally have eternal peace with God. Whether we live for another 50 years after this moment or 5 minutes, neither length nor shortness of life means more or less of this peace. We are fully saved by faith in Jesus Christ- **fully** at the very beginning, **fully** halfway through, and **fully** at the end of our life.

However, it is in the length of life in this profession of faith that we are transformed. For as the breath expelled from us dissolves, God’s reconciled breath within us through His Spirit takes shape. We are transformed. We are being transformed.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” -2 Corinthians 4:16-18

In Christ, we are no longer **wasting away** (**Greek** meaning *natural flow toward decay; fading*) away as the vanity of vanities Solomon is lamenting but are **being renewed** (**Greek** meaning *a causation reversing and bringing the opposite of what is natural due to sin*).

We naturally flow into the direction of all the world, a vanity of vanities. However, in Christ, this direction is changed with a new course leading into a new destination!

Paul is laying out the roadmap on how the reconciled breath within us comes out of us in invitation to the world around us.

Suffering. This refers to a resistance or pressing against us. The Spirit is leading us against the natural current sin has brought into the world. While this can discourage some from following Jesus, for believers it builds within us *endurance*.

Endurance. This is strength training for the soul. As we remain faithful, we gain in strength and mature more and more into what we are becoming. *Solomon pursued the things of this world and grew weaker; those who follow Christ grow stronger!*

Character. More than words, our lives validate our faith. Character is a *proven under trial consistency*.

In all of this we do not earn God’s love; all of this is because we are loved of God!

*“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” **-Romans 5:6-11***

While this may seem like a hard or difficult truth to accept, it is good news. *Why?* God chose to love you while at your worst. Let that sink in for a moment. In the lowest of lowest moments, God looked at you and said, *I choose you to love*. At our worst, we want to get away from that moment and circumstance so quickly; yet even in that place God’s love sovereignly poured into us.

By His Blood. In the Greek this means blood spilled in the most violent of manners. We are saved by faith in His spilled blood for us. We are transformed from *vanity of vanities* into *abundant life* through His Resurrection, destined to share in all that He has received from our Father!

Reconciliation means we have favour with our God; it is of this favor peace is the fruit of. Because of this, His peace (reconciliation) within us comes out with invitation for others to experience this same reconciliation.

The breath that comes out of us now is the ministry of reconciliation because we are reconciled to God!

IV. The Greatest of Vanities (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. **We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**” **-2 Corinthians 5:17-20***

As Solomon asked, what is the point of all of this, we as believers respond with the message, this is the point...Jesus! It has been, continues to be, and always will be about Jesus!

God positions us uniquely and meticulously in the lives of every person we come across. This is regardless of the shortness or length of time we may be a part of their lives. Redeem the time by breathing out reconciliation with God through His Son by His Spirit! We can not control our circumstances, yet we can surrender to the God who does and trust His allowance of anything

that touches us to be a means to strengthen our endurance and transform our character, bringing out the hope he alone sources that the world needs.

And herein lies the warning to neglect this either as someone who has not come to Jesus or one who started but walked away from Jesus.

*“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” **-Hebrews 2:1-4***

The Greatest of vanities is to turn from Jesus and embrace the natural decay of sin for our lives and all that our lives influence.

To choose *death* over *life*.

To choose *guilt* over *forgiveness*.

To choose *vanity* over *life*.

To choose *anything* over *Jesus*...

*Is truly the **greatest of vanities!***