

August 27

Ecclesiastes 12:8, 13-14 (NIV) ⁸“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!” ¹³Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

I used to teach a story by Leo Tolstoy titled How “Much Land Does a Man Need?” It depicts the actions of a poor man who desires to improve his position in life. He obtains some land of his own, which makes him happy. However, before long, his desires grow, causing him to seek even more land. Eventually, he hears of a people who will give a person as much land as one could enclose in a full day by walking. He sees this as the answer to all his “needs.” He begins walking, confident that he will become wealthy. As the day progresses, he feels the urge to take one more step. As the sun begins to set, he knows he must be at his starting place or lose everything. He pushes himself harder and harder only to fall dead within site of the finishing point.

Ecclesiastes can be a difficult book to study because, at first glance, it seems rather depressing. Solomon begins by telling us that everything is vanity (meaningless). The word for “vanity” or “meaningless” literally means “mist, vapor, mere breath.” The book states that all that we hold valuable in this life is but a vapor that will fade, rust, or disappear. Those Olympic medals, while glorious today, will fade over time as will those who won them. The man in the story tied his happiness to this world and to things that will never lead to true peace or happiness and will never satisfy. Solomon, who was the wisest, wealthiest king ever to live, knows the truth of this as he strayed from the Lord. Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven instead of treasures on earth that can fade or be stolen. Solomon echoes this by telling us that only one thing truly matters: fear God and keep His commandments. Tolstoy ends his story by answering the title. A man needs only a plot small enough in which to be buried. The true treasures of this life are the ones that cannot be seen, bought, or earned. The true treasures come from our Father in heaven who gives generously to those who love and obey His Son.