

There Is Nothing New

Ecclesiastes 1:8-11; 1 Timothy 4:4-5

December 12, 2004

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We have arrived at another holiday season (Christmas—for which there is no scriptural warrant) in which shoppers will try to find the newest toy, fashion, car, CD, book, or gadget, hoping to satisfy the one for whom the gift has been purchased. However, we know the scenario all too well. The child that receives the latest toy will enjoy it for a few hours (or possibly for a few days at the most). But the novelty of the toy will soon wear off and that special toy will find its place among all the other toys that fill the closet.

The same is true with adults as well. After the novelty has worn off of that new home, that new car, that new computer, we shove it into the background of our mind and begin to look at something bigger and better. Discontentment (that secret sin that attacks the faithfulness and goodness of God and that makes us feel so miserable in this life) is embraced so quickly by us that where we were thanking and praising God for His goodness in supplying a need or a comfort of life just the day before, we now fall into the trap of grumbling and complaining against the good providence of God because we have grown bored with what we have and because we don't have everything we want.

Man apart from Christ can never find a lasting satisfaction and contentment in this life. When he finds that new love, that new pleasure, that new experience, or that new dream, he soon awakens to learn that what he thought was new was not new at all. It was simply a variation of everything else he already has that does not satisfy. This demonstrates so clearly that all is vanity, when experienced or considered apart from Christ. All is a vapor that cannot quench the thirst of a man, woman, or child who is dying from a lack of the spiritual water of life. Dear ones, only the water of everlasting life that Jesus gives satisfies forever the thirsting of man's soul. Listen to the words of Christ as found in John 4:13-14: Read them.

This Lord's Day we shall continue our study of Ecclesiastes by turning our attention to our text in Ecclesiastes 1:8-11, where we find that life apart from Christ is vanity for the following three reasons: (1) Life Is Exhausting (Ecclesiastes 1:8); (2) Life Is Repetitive (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10); (3) Life Is Forgetful (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

I. Life Is Exhausting (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

A. Solomon, who identifies himself as the Preacher, gathers together the people of God in order to deliver to them an inspired message, detailing for all who will listen how he himself learned from his own experience that man apart from Christ can never find a true joy and an enduring contentment in this life. For joy, peace, and contentment are found only through faith in Christ and in obedience to Christ. Man (apart from Christ) will spend all of his life in seeking to catch that elusive butterfly, but will never ever catch it. Solomon teaches that man "under the sun" (i.e. man apart from Christ) will search a lifetime, spend a fortune, gain the highest accomplishments, and even sacrifice many pleasures, but will never catch joy, peace, and contentment in this life. For joy, peace, and contentment are found not in that which is perishable, but in Him who is imperishable, even in the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. In Ecclesiastes 1:1-2, Solomon states the conclusion that he will set out to prove: All Is Vanity Apart from Christ. Solomon then defends his conclusion by his first argument in Ecclesiastes 1: 3-7: Man Apart from Christ Is Vanishing. Therefore, there is no lasting profit to all of man's labor, for he is here today and gone tomorrow. Man apart from Christ cannot truly enjoy his labor because death will snatch all of his labor

from out of his hands.

C. We now come to the next argument of Solomon which he submits to demonstrate the vanity of all things “under the sun”: Life Is Exhausting (Ecclesiastes 1:8). The point being made here is that an endless pursuit of joy in the labors and things of this life (apart from Christ) wears a person to the very core of his being. For all of his labor, man still has no true joy to show for it. This too is vanity. All his work is futility and without purpose, apart from Jesus Christ.

1. In Ecclesiastes 1:8, Solomon transitions from the endless activity of the sun in its rising and setting (in Ecclesiastes 1:5), from the unceasing activity of the wind in its ongoing currents (in Ecclesiastes 1:6), and from the perpetual activity of the precipitation cycle in its continuous course (in Ecclesiastes 1:7), to man, who too is set on a course of unending labor “under the sun”. Solomon states: “All things are full of labor” (Ecclesiastes 1:8)—the sun, the winds, the rain, and yes, man as well.

2. Now let us be clear that Solomon is not condemning labor (as ordained by God) to be without value in some sense. One of the mandates given to Adam by God in the very day he was created was that he was to work (Genesis 2:15). Work was not a punishment laid upon man’s shoulder for his rebellion. What was laid upon man’s shoulder as a judgment from a holy God was that he would now labor with great exhaustion and weariness of body and soul (i.e. by the sweat of the brow). We, Christians, are not to be a lazy or slothful people, making excuses for why we cannot work (Proverbs 22:13). It is a sin to be lazy, expecting others to wait upon us as if we were royalty (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15).

a. Parents, teach your children even from the time they are very young to be responsible by picking up their toys when they are finished playing with them, or running errands for you. If you don’t want your children to think people owe them everything they want on a silver platter, involve them in household chores.

b. Dear children, you may not have a job where you leave home each day to work, but you should treat your school and your education as that which God has called you to work hard to accomplish at this point in your life. Are you working hard in your schoolwork? Or do your parents have to continually remind you of all that needs to be accomplished? Never forget that work is good for you and that you are either learning each day to be a good worker or you are learning each day to be a lazy child that makes all kinds of excuses why you can’t do what you’re told to do.

3. So Solomon is not condemning work when properly used. He is simply showing that a career or a job that one thinks will bring true joy and contentment in this life (apart from Christ) is vanity. All that preparation you have expended over many years to finally reach that job you have dreamed of having will prove to be just exhausting hard work without true joy, if you do not seek in your work to glorify God and to enjoy Him. Why does your present job seem so boring and tiring to you? Is it because you are not doing so to the glory of Christ? Have you forgotten that God in His good providence has given you that job at this point in your life to serve Him? There is nothing wrong with desiring and praying to move up the ladder or to earn a better income for yourself and your family at the right time (promotion comes from the Lord, Psalm 75:6-7). However, if you are a miserable, grumbling, and unthankful Christian, you will be exhausted by your work, rather than refreshed by it. You will be bored by your work, rather than excited by it. Why? Because you are not serving Christ in your work, but rather serving only yourself in your work.

D. Before moving on to the next main point, Solomon simply states in Ecclesiastes 1:8 what everyone knows to be true in his/her own heart about the weariness of mind involved in work apart from Christ.

1. “Man cannot utter it.” THE MOUTH knows it by the words that continually proceed from our own mouths (“I hate my job”, “I am so bored by my job”, “I would rather watch TV and file for unemployment than do this menial work”).

2. Moreover, “the eye is not satisfied with seeing.” THE EYES also know it by always wanting a bigger and better job, but finding once we have attained that for which we have worked so hard, that it does not truly satisfy us apart from Jesus Christ.

3. And finally, “nor the ear filled with hearing.” THE EARS know that no one is truly content at work by the incessant complaining and constant thanklessness that we hear from others.

E. Finally, dear ones, do not miss the point that Solomon is making here. He is not saying that some work (apart from Christ) is a wearisome vanity, but that ALL work (“under the sun”) is an unending vapor that cannot bring true joy in this life. Only that work which is done TO GLORIFY CHRIST brings true satisfaction, for only that work is blessed by Christ to our soul. Only that work which is done TO SERVE CHRIST brings true contentment, for only that work will be rewarded by Christ not only in this life, but in heaven to come (Galatians 6:9). Only that work which is done OUT OF LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST has meaning and purpose and is not done in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Dear ones, be a Joseph in your work. Sold into slavery by his own brothers, Joseph worked to the glory of God and became the chief servant wherever he was: whether in the household of Potiphar or whether in the prison cell. The Lord rewarded him for his faithful service in doing even menial work to the glory of God by elevating him to the number 2 spot in Egypt (just under Pharaoh himself). No work is too menial to be done to God’s glory, out of love for Jesus Christ, or with a thankful heart for the many mercies God has bestowed upon such undeserving, unworthy people like you and me. God will use this kind of work in our lives to bring true satisfaction and an everlasting reward. This kind of work may be physically exhausting, but it will not be mentally exhausting, for it will be work that has meaning and purpose. This kind of work will not be a vapor, but will endure.

II. Life Is Repetitive (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

A. Solomon next offers another argument to support His conclusion that all is vanity under the sun: THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN—LIFE SIMPLY TENDS TO REPEAT ITSELF DAY AFTER DAY.

1. Here is a man who works so hard to reach a level of success in life and upon reaching it he soon learns that it is in essence like any other success he has already reached. The novelty of the success wears off, and he is again discontent and is looking for another new success that will bring joy and contentment.

2. Or there is a young man or a young woman who dreams of fulfilling all of his/her dreams by marrying the love of his/her life, only to learn that this dream is in essence like any other dream that has been dreamed. The novelty of marriage loses its glamour and glory, and the love of one’s life does not appear to be as perfect in beauty or in charm as before imagined. And so this dream (like every other dream) does not bring true joy (apart from Christ), but becomes one of many dreams that repeats itself over and over again.

3. This is the message Solomon is seeking to communicate: There is really nothing essentially new for those who are apart from Christ. There is an unending repetition of one success after another, one dream after another, one birthday after another; and the one success, dream, or birthday that we reach does not truly satisfy—in fact, it is not essentially different from all of the others that have already occurred from ancient times.

B. Solomon is NOT saying that there is no new invention or that there is no new technology (as if there is nothing new in an absolute sense). Nor is he denying that the knowledge of man throughout history is progressive and new aspects of knowledge have been added to the realm of man’s understanding about the world and universe in which he lives. It is an observable fact that man has not always had cars, airplanes, microwave ovens, refrigerators, televisions, or computers. It is an observable fact that man has not always known the complexity of cells and the intricacy of the building blocks within the atom that form each cell. The

skeptic will disparage the words of Solomon at this point because the skeptic wants to interpret the inspired words of Solomon in such a way as to make Solomon sound silly and ridiculous. However, the wisest man that ever lived is not making such a foolish declaration. Nor is Solomon condemning that which may be new by way of invention or technology as if there is something evil associated with that which advances man's knowledge, or improves man's comfort, or extends man's life. The evil is not in the invention or in the thing itself, as if evil resides in that which is physical, material, or novel. The evil resides in the sinful use of that which is physical, material, or novel. Guns, wine, alcoholic beverages, computers, and televisions are not evil, but they may surely be used for that which is evil (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

C. Solomon has stated that there is nothing new "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). For those who live their lives apart from Christ or think, speak, and behave as though Christ has nothing to say to them, it is true that to such a person nothing is new. There is a meaningless repetition of dreams, hours, and events which can bring no true joy or lasting satisfaction. However, for the Christian, life is full of new things every day because Christ gives meaning and purpose to life. The Christian is not one who lives "under the sun" and lives apart from Christ, but he is one who lives "above the sun" and lives in faith and obedience to Christ. The Bible teaches that the Christian's life is continually filled with that which is new, refreshing, and truly satisfying to the soul of a man. Consider with me the many "new" gifts that are ours, now and forever in Christ. The idea of "new" (as it is used in the various passages of Scripture that follow) does not emphasize that which is "new in time", but rather that which is "new in quality" i.e. that which is better and truly satisfying to a man.

1. A new song (Psalm 40:3). This is not a warrant to write new songs to sing in worship to God, but a warrant to sing those inspired psalms found in the Psalter with a new quality of heart in praise and thanksgiving to God.

2. New mercies everyday (Lamentations 3:22-23). These are not mercies that have never been given before, but mercies that have a new quality to them because we realize we do not deserve the slightest mercy from God due to our sin against Him.

3. A new testament in Christ's blood (1 Corinthians 11:25). This is not a new last will and testament, as if there was never before a last will and testament made upon earth, but this is a better last will and testament than any other that has ever been made. For all the blessings in heaven and on earth were sealed to Christians when Christ died and shed His blood.

4. A new commandment (John 13:34). God's commandment to love one another was not new in time when Christ uttered this (Leviticus 19:18), but rather new in quality, because we now are able to see this love manifested in Christ's laying down His own life to save unworthy sinners.

5. A new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new creature is new in that it has not only physical life, but spiritual life as well.

6. A new covenant (Hebrews 8:8). This covenant with Israel and Judah is not new, as if God had not previously made a covenant with Israel and Judah. Rather it is new in that it is a better covenant that will actually restore Israel to Christ.

7. A new name (Revelation 2:17). We all have names, but God will give us a new name which signifies the close familiar relationship we shall enjoy with Christ for all eternity.

8. A new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). There is already a heaven and earth, but there is coming a renewed and glorious heaven and earth that will never pass away.

D. Dear ones, why would you spend your life on that which is old, dull, unsatisfying, unfulfilling, and without meaning or purpose, when you can spend your life on that which is new, satisfying, full of meaning and purpose now and for all eternity? The choice is simple: Do you want that which is hopeless in bringing true joy, satisfaction, and contentment; or do you want that which is certain to bring true joy, satisfaction, and contentment? Of course, that is not to say that the life of a Christian is without pain,

heartache, suffering, discouragement, worry, or fear. Or that a Christian does not fall into various sins throughout his life. It is simply to say that although the Christian knows from experience all these trials, he also knows that there is hope, joy, and contentment only in trusting in Christ, only in loving Christ, and only in serving Christ. As the Psalmist so aptly states it: “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10). Give me what seems to be the most menial job in serving Christ and that is better than the best the world has to offer.

III. Life Is Forgetful (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

A. Finally, Solomon offers this last argument from our text today to demonstrate that “all is vanity” under the sun: “LIFE IS FORGETFUL.” Here is a man or a woman that has worked so hard to make a name for himself/herself. But as time goes by, there are always those who will come after, who will invent something better, explain it better, hit more homeruns, sing better, make more money, and rule longer and over more territory. If you have placed your joy, contentment, and purpose in life in making a name for yourself that will endure throughout the ages (as the best or the greatest at this or that), you will only be disappointed. You will never be able to enjoy what you have accomplished in life, for you will be consumed with making a name for yourself. You will live your life in worry and anxiety always looking over your shoulder at those who will come after you, who will break your record or best you in some way. And when you are bested whether before you die or after you die, your name and your accomplishments will fade into the background and lose the glory they once had.

B. Dear ones, the only way to have a name that will bring everlasting joy, peace, and contentment, is to receive “a new name” from Jesus Christ—a name that finds its everlasting worth and value not in who you are as a man, woman, or child upon the earth, but who you are as a man, woman, or child in Jesus Christ. The only way that the works which we do here upon the earth will have everlasting remembrance and reward are if those works are done to the glory of Christ, out of love for Christ, and in serving Christ (Matthew 25:31-46). Whose name and whose works are more important to you—yours or Christ’s? Those who have spent their lives in making a name for themselves will know no joy or peace for all eternity. Those who give up their name to receive a new name from Christ will know only joy and peace for all eternity.

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