

# The Final Word—Conveyed

Ecclesiastes 12:8-12

Halifax: 30 March 2014

## Introduction:

I had originally thought that I would conclude our sermon series in Ecclesiastes today, but I changed my mind.

- There is too much here to do it all in one sermon because in the last two verses—really in verse 13, Solomon sums up the whole of man!
- In 12:13, he says:
  - **Ecc 12:13: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.**
    - He is saying that this is all that there is to man—it is the whole...
      - Nothing else matters!
      - We were made for God, and if we are detached from conscious living communion with Him, we are nothing—we are lost—we are dead.
      - We were made for Him—to worship Him, to know Him, to love Him, to depend on Him, to serve Him, to obey Him, to live for Him.
        - He is our all...and all of our life is for Him!
    - That means that man is not man—not truly human...
      - if he does not fear God and keep His commandments...he is dead!
        - Everything about us is to be about God or we are dead.
    - Now of course as soon as you say this, the objections start to flood in!
      - The problem is, we do not want to be tied to God—that is why we rebel even though rebellion only harms us.
        - We want to be free to be something else...besides man—but there is nothing else to be.
        - And all we can be is vanity if we are cut off from God—dead—lost—ruined!
      - Solomon has been telling us that from the beginning...
        - He has been telling us that if we look at what we are now—under the sun—in this world without God—
          - we are vanity—*havel* in Hebrew—which literally means *a breath*
          - Like the breath that you can see on a cold morning...
            - We are as insubstantial as that—here and gone—not lasting.
        - That is what we have become because of sin...
          - And because that is not what we properly are—what we are meant to be—what we were created to be—*those who fear God and keep His commandments*—

- Then verse 14 tells us that we will be judged—because we who were made to have everything about us about God have become vanity.
  - It says:
    - **Ecc 12:14: For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.**
  - Everything about us will be judged for having been cut off from God—unless of course we are restored to Him through Jesus Christ...

That is the conclusion that Solomon is bringing us to—the final word!

- I must devote a whole sermon to that conclusion—
  - I hope I can do it all in one sermon.
- I have planned to call that sermon, “The Final Word Summed Up.”
  - But we will save that for next time because first we need to look at what comes before this final summation of man.

This week I want to look at that fact that Solomon sees himself as conveying to us the final word in an authoritative sense—

- He says that is what he is doing—and that *is* what he is doing...
  - And oooooee! this is something that makes modern men burn!
  - They can’t stand for anyone to claim to have the final word!
  - They don’t want there to be a final word.
    - They will mock and scoff and jeer and try to relegate to barbarism anybody who claims to have a final word to convey...
      - especially if that person says that word comes with divine authority!
- And because these scoffers have so much influence and their mocking is so strong and so intimidating and universally received...
  - This is a subject that we very much need to look at!
    - We need to see that God’s word is always final—it is not something to be revised and altered in any way because it is from God.
  - And so this week, I have entitled my sermon “The Final Word Conveyed!”
    - I want to show you that there is a final word about life—from God!
    - Next time, we will look at what the final word is about man...
      - But this time, I simply want to show you that there is a final word about life and I want to show you how it is conveyed through men like Solomon.
      - You can laugh with the scoffers if you want to, but that will not change the fact that there is a final word from the penmen of the Holy Bible—there is absolute truth.
        - Laughing doesn’t change that—it just deepens your condemnation and shame in the end.

Our scripture reading begins in Ecclesiastes 12:8. I will go ahead and read to the end of the chapter, but our focus will be on verses 8-12 this week...

- That is the part that tells us that there is a final word and it tells us about how we ought to receive it as the final word.

Listen now as I read to you from God's word—Ecclesiastes 12:8

**Ecclesiastes 12:8-14:** “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All is vanity.”<sup>9</sup> And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out *and* set in order many proverbs.<sup>10</sup> The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and *what was written was upright*—words of truth.<sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails,

given by one Shepherd.<sup>12</sup> And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is no end*, and much study *is wearisome to the flesh*.<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

May the LORD bless to us the hearing of His holy Word.

The heart of what we want to look at today is in verse 9-12...

- I have already told you the essence of it—
  - that it shows us that Solomon speaks final words to us with divine authority...
- But before we get to that, we need to look briefly at Solomon's conclusion about what man is when he does not fear God and keep His commandments...
  - This is nothing new—it is what he has been telling us about man under the sun, detached from God, from the very beginning...

## I. The stubborn fact remains about us: “All is vanity!”

A. Solomon repeats this melancholy truth in verse 8:

- **Ecc 12:8:** “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All is vanity.”
  1. Again, vanity—*hebel* in Hebrew—means *vapour*, a breath...
    - Solomon's argument has been that because man is a dying entity, he is *hebel*.
      - We were created so as to never die, but because of sin, we are all going to die and in many ways we are already dead—dead in sin.
    - Solomon has just told us in verse 7 that old age will overtake us if we live long enough, and that in any case we will die and turn to dust...
      - **Ecc 12:7: the dust will return to the earth as it was,**
      - Death changes everything...
        - It makes the sum total of our existence *hebel!*
        - We are here—then we are gone—and that is it!
        - We end up right back where we started from.
          - That is *hebel*—that is but a vapour.
  2. Many people hate this book—this book of Ecclesiastes—because it just gives us the raw facts about life...
    - It tells it like it is.
      - It leaves us stark naked with no place to hide.

- People don't like that because they like to pretend—to dream that they are somehow significant...
- But as far anything counts under the sun, without consideration of the eternal God—
  - the sum total of our existence is just a little more than zero.

B. Solomon leaves us with no pretenses.

1. If we simply return to the dust from which we came and that is all, then why does it matter if I kill or steal or lie or rape or molest children?
  - Why does it matter if I learn stuff?
  - Why does it matter if I go to school or do drugs, whether I look nice or not, whether I am fat or thin, strong or weak, healthy or sick?
  - Why does it matter if I can win the Olympics or the heart of someone I have a crush on?
  - Why does it matter if some villain blows up the world or if a comet strikes the earth and turns it into a million tiny pieces?
2. It doesn't matter—we still end up as dust.
  - Ashes to ashes and dust to dust—what difference does it really make?
    - We all know that it really doesn't make any difference—if this is all there is—if the time we have here is all there is.
  - We are not supposed to say so, but it really does not matter.

C. God has turned us to death because we turned to live apart from Him.

1. That is what almost everybody does by nature since the fall—unless God changes us.
  - It is very superficial—we really can't do anything lasting—it's all just a vapour.
2. People live this way and they rarely face the hard questions...
  - I'm not talking about esoteric, way-out-there questions...
    - I am talking about very basic questions—the question of my very reason to be.
    - If I don't know my reason to be, then I don't have a reason to be—at least not one that belongs to me...
    - And if I come up with something superficial like “to help people,” the question is, “to help them what?” to help them get to where they are going in life?
      - And where is that? back to the dust?
        - So are you going to do something to help them get to the dust faster or more efficiently or what?
        - It is all just *hebel*, there is no denying it.

TRANS> This is so, but look...

## II. Solomon declares that all is *hebel*, and yet he labours hard as a preacher.

- How does it make sense for him to labour to convey knowledge if he believes that everything is vanity—just a vapour?

A. First of all, look at how hard he works in his preaching—he tells us...

1. In verse 9, he says that he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs...
  - *Pondered* is from a word that refers to a balance for weighing things...
    - So in other words, he weighed them out—portioned them and measured them to make sure that they were right in their emphasis.
  - *To seek them out* is related to this—to test them, explore them so as to get the depth of them.
  - *To set in order* is to straighten out whatever is crooked about them.
    - This is the same word he used a couple of times in Ecclesiastes to say that what God makes crooked cannot be straightened out...
    - But he straightened out his proverbs to make them clear and helpful.

➤ But why do this if everything is *hebel*?

- In verse 10, he goes on...
2. He says that he laboured to write words that were both acceptable and upright... words that were true.
    - Acceptable words are words that are pleasant to hear, receivable you might say—or palatable...
      - He did not serve raw meat to his hearers, but food that was carefully prepared to be acceptable...
    - And he also laboured to make sure that they were words of integrity...
      - Not only well cooked, but also wholesome and healthy.
      - And he assures us that they were—he wrote nothing but what was true.
  3. This is one of the great things about the scriptures a whole...
    - a. They are written for the purpose of conveying truth to real people...
      - They are meant to be understood by ordinary people.
      - The authors, like Solomon, laboured not to be impressive, but to be clear to the common man.
    - b. The main problem we have with understanding them is in receiving them.
      - That is why people ignore what the Bible says about women preachers or about drama in worship...
      - That is why a fellow has trouble understanding what the scriptures say about his duties as a husband—because he does not want to understand...
        - or about election—not because it is unclear but because he doesn't like it.
        - or about uncovering the nakedness of a woman to whom he is not married...

- You may have heard about the fiasco last week with World Vision—announcing that they would accept those who were in same sex marriages because they were not theologians and it was up to the churches to hammer it out...
  - The Bible is not the least bit unclear about it—but it is unclear to those who don't want to know...
  - The folks at World Vision quickly changed their mind due to the response they got from those who were holding to the word.
- This is how we end up with designer religion—with idolatrous worship.
  - Instead of receiving God's word, which is plain and clear, we try to muddy it up.
  - I find when I talk to people about church music—about the use of instruments and about singing Psalms only in public worship,
    - a lot of people don't have any argument except that they don't like it.
    - Perhaps that is why all but two of Israel's kings allowed worship at altars outside of Jerusalem even though God forbade it—they thought it seemed nice.
    - That is not a good argument—
      - You don't want to go there because you are putting yourself in the place of a judge rather than under God's word!
- c. The words of scripture are from God!
  - They are given by inspiration of God...
    - That is how Solomon can say that his words are true...
  - My brothers and sisters, don't play around with the scriptures!
    - Do you not fear God?
  - Don't mess around with the truth—whether you like it or not...
    - It is not up to you to decide—it is up to God!
      - He is the God who struck a man dead for not transporting the ark in the prescribed manner...
      - He is the God who killed Aaron's sons for offering strange fire on His altar.
- So Solomon, like all the authors of scripture, wrote with plainness and truth in view.
  - Yes, there are things that are hard to understand, but overall, the Bible is marvellously direct and straightforward.
  - But again—Why?
    - Why does Solomon labour to be clear?
      - If all is vanity, then does that not include the words that he himself has written?
    - No it does not include his words...
      - We have just seen that they are truth

- And do you know what is true about truth?
    - It lasts—it is not a vapour—it is joined to God and God abides forever.
      - Lies don't last—they are exposed eventually.
      - But truth always stands—
        - It breaks into a world of vanity with what lasts forever!
        - The word of God brings into *hebel* what is eternal!
- B. Solomon labours to be clear because he is wise...he has something to say... something that is lasting and eternal!
1. He tells us in verse 9 that it was because he was wise that he worked hard to be clear and accurate in his teaching...
    - He wanted to speak into *hebel* what is not *hebel*.
    - Do you see that in verse 9?
      - **Ecc 12:9: And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge...**
      - Do you see how it says that he *still* taught them?
        - Why does it say *still*?
      - He *still* taught them even though all is vanity!
        - He still taught them because he had something to say... something wise and enduring to say to them.
- Remember what wisdom is—what a wise man is...
2. A wise man is a man that knows what to do to make things come out right.
    - Think of someone making a wise choice about whom to marry...
      - They make a choice that will bring blessing to them and not sorrow in the days to come!
    - Think of someone making a wise choice about an investment...
      - I had a fellow a few years ago—just before the stock market crashed—who urged me to take out a mortgage so I could invest in the market that always went up!
        - It would have been very foolish—if I had done it, I would be in a deep hole now.
  3. Solomon, like all writers of scripture, knows that God has blessed him with divine wisdom that can really help people...
    - The word burns in the preacher's heart, you see...
      - He wants to get it out to the people...to rescue them from *hebel*!
      - It grieves him when they do not listen because he knows that what he has for them is good and true.
        - He is not there to make a show, he is labouring to convey precious truth about God to God's people—to free them from vanity!

- Ecclesiastes gives us what is true in a world that is a lie!
  - What could be more important than to know what our whole reason to be is?
  - What sorrow will come to those who miss this—who live and die as fools—with nothing but this world in view...
    - In ignorance of God who made them and in ignorance of His purposes for them—awakened to be judged!
  - But what blessing comes to those who are attached to God by these words of truth—attached to Him forever!
    - Attached to His Son and to His grace and to all His truth—forever!
- The truth burns in Solomon’s heart and that is why he labours to make it plain to the people.

TRANS> And so as you might expect,

### **III. Solomon commends the words of the wise...**

- such as the words are that he has written to us in Ecclesiastes, and such as the words that are in all of scripture...
  - He commends them to us as something that we ought to receive with the highest regard.

A. Look at how he describes the words of the wise in verse 11...

1. First, that they are like goads...
  - Do you know what a goad is—such as an ox goad?
    - It is a sharp instrument that is used to drive a team of oxen—you poke them with a goad to get them going when they are being slack.
  - That is one of the great uses of scripture and of the faithful preaching of scripture...
    - It pokes you when you are getting sluggish in your service to God...
    - It pokes you to wake you up and to get you going in the right direction.
  - There are a lot of goads in Ecclesiastes that we have encountered...
    - Did the pokes get you going?
      - Remember when we talked about this very matter of listening when you go to God’s house?
      - Remember the warnings about holding on to bitterness or speaking harsh words to others that only create trouble for you and others?
      - Remember the exhortation about casting your bread on the waters—being diligent to give to others and to serve them?
      - Remember just last week about enjoying life while you can?
        - Welcome the prodding and respond appropriately to it!
        - Too often we are like stubborn mules who need to be prodded.
        - Don’t let it all slip away!



2. Secondly, the words of the wise are said to be like well driven nails.
  - You know what nails are for—they are to hold things in place!
  - That is one of the precious things about God’s word...
    - Every generation and every society has things that they believe and things that they commend...
      - but if they are not centred on God’s word, they are always wrong and distorted somehow...
        - One society values strength, but in doing so they oppress the weak and the strong do not support the weak as the Bible teaches.
        - Another society values compassion, but in doing so they make excuses for sinful behaviour which is really not compassionate at all...it ruins the people you are trying to show compassion to.
        - Another society values freedom, but they end up trampling over each other—
          - even claiming the freedom to murder as we do with abortion
          - or freedom to engage in lewd behaviour—
          - What happens with my freedom to rape or to molest children?
    - You get the point—we need truth that transcends culture...
      - We need a standard from God by which to judge—and that is what we are given in the Holy Scriptures.
      - We need to see the truth set forth to us in Ecclesiastes...this absolute, ultimate unchanging truth that Solomon concludes with...
        - that properly, life for man consists in nothing else but fearing God and keeping His commandments!
        - That is something that Solomon nails down in this book, and it is something that we ought to hold on to.
3. Thirdly, the words of the wise are said to be “given by one Shepherd!”
  - Notice that the translators have capitalized the word Shepherd!
    - and well they should...
    - Solomon is showing us here that all the words that he and the other writers of scripture have given us are from the LORD, the great Shepherd of His people.
  - All scripture, as 2 Timothy 3:16 says, is given by inspiration of God...or more literally, is God-breathed!
    - Our gracious Lord has been pleased, brothers and sisters, to convey His word to us in writing.
    - He has carefully guided each author in such a way that what comes out of their pen is His infallible word of truth! It is God-breathed!
    - Even though the Bible was written over the course of many centuries, it is completely harmonious and unified.
      - Even though many different authors from different backgrounds and different walks of life wrote it, it originates from one LORD.

- And it is all the more helpful to us that He is here called a *Shepherd*...
    - He is the one who has come to care for His people—to speak words of peace and blessing to them...
      - Yet to also issue words of warning to keep us from destroying ourselves or from going astray.
    - Oh how He feeds the souls of those who hear His voice!
      - With what nourishment—with what comfort—with what wisdom in a world of vanity!
- B. So having commended the word to you, Solomon now urges you to receive it alone.
1. In verse 12, he says, “**Be admonished by these...**”
    - These what?
      - These words of the wise that come from our loving Shepherd Jesus Christ.
    - Yes, receive them with the reverence and love that is due to them!
      - They come from the LORD of glory who has all wisdom and authority.
      - They come from this LORD who gave His life for you and who would never lead you astray!
    - Be admonished by these words dear brothers and sisters!
      - It is here that life and blessing are found!
      - Search the scriptures, lay them up in your heart, practice them in your lives!
  - But there is also something to avoid—something you should not listen to.
2. Don’t listen to the endless chatter of the world...
    - a. The prophets have warned us...
      - As Isaiah says, “**If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them!**”
      - As Jesus said,
        - **John 10:27:** “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give them eternal life...”
        - **John 10:5** “Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”
      - Their words (about life) are *hebel*
    - b. Having told us to be admonished by the words of the wise, Solomon adds,
      - **Ecc 12:12:** **Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.**
      - How true this is!
        - The men of this world go round and round—always speculating—always surmising—but they never settle upon the truth...
          - They come to truth with things like technology—building planes and computers and things...
            - but not with the behavioural sciences or with philosophy.

- No indeed—
    - In philosophy, each time a great philosopher arises, he overthrows the work of those that went before.
    - Sometimes completely!
  - And take psychiatry—
    - The differences between great men like Skinner, Rodgers, and Freud are monumental...
      - Skinner is the behaviourist who seeks to control people by reward and punishment...
      - Rodgers, on the other hand, teaches that the truth is found within and he merely reflects what the individual says so he can solve his own problems...
      - And Freud—he sees the client as completely helpless and in need of reprogramming by therapy sessions that take them through past experiences.
    - As Timothy says, they are *ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*
      - You can read one book after another until you are weary and still be just as lost as you were to start with!
    - In fact, many of them don't even want to know the truth...
      - They mock at the idea—they don't ever want to have their questions answered, they don't want to know because they don't want to bow to the LORD of glory!
3. My brothers and sisters, there is always a danger for us...
- A danger that we will stop listening to the voice of our Shepherd...
    - That we will become indifferent to what He says to us in His word!
    - That we will stop cherishing His promises and yearning for His counsel and trembling at His warnings...
      - We can grow cold like the church at Ephesus did and lose our first love!
      - Don't let that ever happen to you!
- C. Don't you see? It is by hearing and believing the Word of God that we are joined to Jesus Christ!
1. His words are life, and to reject His words is death!
- Don't you see—you are in a world that is detached from God by rebellion.
    - It is *hebel*...vanity—a vapour.
  - We are all fallen creatures...
    - And it is God's word that penetrates the darkness of your soul and unites you to Christ when you receive it!

- It breaks into the vanity with what is not vanity!
  - Jesus said,
    - **John 5:24: Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.**
2. Please, examine yourself!
- Are you yearning for God's word?
    - Are you yearning for it that you might live it out?
    - Are you yearning for it that you might know Christ and rest in Him and in His promises?
3. How precious His words are to those who are receiving them!
- What comfort there is when the world is so crazy and so empty to rest in the sure promises and to walk in the light of truth!
  - How good the LORD has been to us to give us His word!
    - Let us hear what the Spirit says to us!
    - Let us pray every time we hear a sermon—every time we read our Bibles!
    - We have the very Word of God given to us!
      - Thanks be to God!