

Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity: Ecclesiastes 1's Opening Cry

Scriptures for Today: Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

""Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. 3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?""

Introduction to Ecclesiastes 1: The Search for Meaning

If I gave you everything the world says you need to be happy—money, health, beauty, respect—would it be enough (Pause)?

Your dream house with a pool and a three-car garage. A healthy, muscular, lean, and fit body that never aches. A marriage that is just amazing. Children who love you. The bank account that never runs out. A job where people call you boss. Your social media accounts get millions of followers. A boat. A motorcycle. Any food you want when you want it. A driver to drive you around and take you wherever you want to go. A helicopter. A private jet. Riches.

Would it be enough?

You could travel anywhere, eat anything, own everything. But if your soul is still empty, what have you really gained? An empty soul with every physical thing you could ever want. Would all those things be enough?

You already know the answer. The answer is No. All of those things will never be enough.

There's a saying, a proverb, that says: "Money can't buy happiness." And then there's a country song that turns that into an abomination. That song says, "Money can't buy happiness but it can buy me a boat. It can buy me a truck to pull it. It can buy me a Yeti cooler with liquor in it. Money can't buy everything, but it could buy me a boat."

So, yeah, money can buy you things. Money can buy you the poison liquor. Money can buy you drugs. But you won't be happy for long. Money can buy a lot of things, but is it enough?

That's exactly where Solomon starts the Book of Ecclesiastes—at the end of the road everyone else is still chasing down.

He had everything. Make sure you understand how much Solomon had. HE HAD IT ALL. The gold. The power. The women. The fame. The wisdom. The kingdom. HE HAD IT ALL.

And when the dust settled, he stood there looking at it all and said:

“Vanity of vanities, saith THE PREACHER, all is vanity.”

What does that mean? All is vanity. Everything in this world is empty and temporary if God isn't in it. You can have it for a second and then it's gone. A Little Debbie is good for a second but then it's gone.

Life without God is like trying to grab smoke—it looks real for a moment, but it slips right through your fingers. You can spend your entire life, every moment, chasing success, money, relationships, pleasure—but without God, it all fades away. It doesn't last. It doesn't satisfy. And it doesn't follow you past the grave or even into the grave.

The wisest man in the world discovered what most people never do—*that you can win everything and still lose your soul.*

Life without God doesn't hold weight. It looks solid to the physical eye. It looks great. But it's hollow. It shines for a moment—then disappears. A shooting star is amazing to see but then it's gone in a flash. You can fill your hands with the world and still end up empty.

Vanity isn't just emptiness—it's the tragedy of chasing things that can't fill you.

Verse 1 – The Voice of the Preacher

""Ecclesiastes 1:1

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

The son of David the giant killer. A preacher. A king. That's a resume right there. The son of a giant killer, the son of a man of war, a preacher, and a king. Notice exactly what Solomon says right there. Not THE KING, not THE RULER, not THE RICHEST MAN, but "THE" PREACHER. Solomon calls himself the Preacher.

Why would the wealthiest man on earth choose the title “Preacher” over every other crown he wore? Because in the eyes of God, the highest honor isn't sitting on a throne — it's **standing with truth.**

You, every one of you, have the opportunity to be preachers of God's word.

Kings rule nations, but preachers reach souls. One day the crowns of rulers will melt, but the words of a preacher will still echo in eternity. Let me say that again so you understand. The words of a preacher will continue to echo into eternity.

(Hold up Bible) This is the real scepter of power — not gold, not government, but the Word of the Most High. This Bible packs more power than all the gold in the world.

There is no higher title than to be a voice for God. Not a voice for yourself. Not for fame. Not for fortune. But a voice for God.

Solomon had servants, soldiers, singers — but what he cherished most was speaking the words of God. That's why the verse doesn't say, "*The words of Solomon*," but "*The words of the Preacher*."

To preach is to **declare Heaven's truth in a dying world.**

It's standing between light and darkness saying, "*Thus saith the Lord*."

It's being Heaven's microphone in a noisy culture.

Here's a question for you. What if the greatest thing you could ever do isn't build a business, or buy a house, but preach a message that changes someone's eternity? I love preaching. And when I love to preach God's words, the message comes through even clearer.

Men — preach in your homes, in your workplace, on the streets. Lead your families not just by what you provide but by what you proclaim.

Women — you may not hold the pulpit inside the church, but you can still **preach outside the walls**: in conversations, online, in witness, in compassion, in courage.

Every time you lift up Jesus to someone lost, you're preaching.

Young people — your school hallways are pulpits. Your social media is a platform. Use it to preach the truth while everyone else posts lies. While everyone else is posting dance videos and drunken videos, you preach the word of God.

God has always used ordinary voices — fishermen, farmers, mothers, teenagers — to shake nations. He takes the small, like you and I, and God shakes the nations. Not the town—the nations. We will reach the entire world with the word of God right here from this small church in West Louisville, Kentucky.

Imagine if I had a handful of glittering sand in my hand. It's sparkling. It's beautiful. That's what the world offers you—glittering for a second and then gone with one breath. GONE WITH ONE BREATH.

But when you speak God's Word, you plant seeds that outlive sand, stone, gold, and treasures. The world fades; the Word endures. The world passes away. God's words NEVER pass away.

So why does a man who had it all call it empty? Because he learned that the greatest success isn't in what you *own* — it's in what you *proclaim*. He's about to reveal the greatest illusion of life under the sun: that everything looks full until you leave God out.

Verse 2 – The Cry of Emptiness

""Ecclesiastes 1:2

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.""

In Hebrew, “vanity” means vapor—breath, smoke, mist. You can see it, but you can’t hold it. It looks solid for a moment, then it’s gone. Like your breath on a cold day—you can see it, you can try to grab it, but you can’t. This is vanity.

Solomon says life *without God* is just that—empty breath dressed up as purpose.

We live in the most “successful” generation that’s also the most anxious, medicated, and suicidal. Why? Because everyone’s chasing smoke.

We are the most entertained, comfortable, and connected generation. But yet we have the most problems. Why? Everyone is chasing smoke.

They’ve got new cars in the driveway but panic in the driver’s seat. They post smiling selfies while crying alone at night. They’ve got full closets and empty hearts. They scroll for hours but never feel seen. They buy bigger houses but can’t build a home. They have gym memberships but no peace of mind. They chase likes, followers, and promotions — but can’t find rest for their souls.

They’re building empires of air—relationships without commitment, careers without rest, pleasure without peace, religion without repentance. It’s the illusion of fullness in a world that’s starving for meaning. They’re reaching for clouds — chasing vapor — running after what vanishes the moment they grab it.

That’s what Solomon means when he says, “*Vanity of vanities... all is vanity.*” He’s looking at our generation through time and saying, “*You’re holding smoke.*” You’ve got nothing in your hands. You think you’ve got something, but you’ve got nothing. That’s the cry of emptiness you see right there in that verse.

Solomon isn’t trying to depress you—he’s trying to wake you up. He’s saying, “Stop wasting your breath on things that won’t last.”

Here’s a question for you that I want you to think about. What’s the “smoke” in your life? What are you clutching that has no eternal weight? Think about it deeply. Write those things down. Things that have no eternal value. Here’s something to think about. Animals don’t hold eternal value. Many people put lots of work, time, and money into their animals.

Implementation (within 24 hours): Write down one thing you’ve been chasing that has no eternal value—and replace it with one act of eternal investment.

Maybe it's time with your kids—they have eternal value, maybe you want to spend more time with me or Pam or Callie or Taylor or Emma or Abigail—we have eternal value, soul winning, prayer, or Scripture. Trade vapor for value.

TV. Trash the programming. Not needed. No eternal value. For example, many people don't want to miss a show, a football game, a basketball game, March Madness, the Super Bowl, or anything like that.

But the next church service they don't mind missing. And every church service you miss is you missing out on eternal things—things that truly matter forever.

Verse 3 — The Question That Haunts Humanity

""Ecclesiastes 1:3

What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?""

Solomon asks the same question every tired worker, every burned-out parent, every ambitious business man or woman eventually asks:

"What's the point?" I have all this money. I have all these things. "What's the point?"

Under the sun, meaning without God, *nothing* truly profits. We have all these things but we don't have God. What's the point? Imagine spending your life building up your bank account and never preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And then you die one day like that. Huge bank account but no one got to heaven because of you preaching the Gospel.

The bank account is left behind. Your family and friends left behind. You didn't give them anything that mattered. That's sad. People miss out on heaven because you were focused on paper money.

You can build, earn, post, and plan—but it fades like mist in the morning. It's there. And then it's gone.

Imagine I have your work timecard in my hand. I'm holding your timecard right here. "You can trade every hour for dollars, but you can't buy back a single minute of your life." Think about that. You trade the hours in your life for dollars every week. You will never get those minutes back. You will never get that time back.

Will you trade the hours in your life for money? Or, will you put some work in there for the eternal things of God? Will you go out soul winning with us? Will you get to church even though you aren't getting food or money or things? Will you trade that time for eternal things of God?

In my life, I've noticed that people will get to work to get that paycheck. But they won't get to church because they aren't getting paid with money or food or things.

People spend their lives climbing the ladder of success—only to realize it's leaning against the wrong wall. That ladder of success is leaning against a wall that is breaking. When you get to the top, you'll see that it breaks. You thought you knew what you had and that it was so great, but you get there, and find out it was nothing.

Mothers will trade their children for a great career. Husbands will trade their amazing God given wife for a career. Why? For money. For a car. For a house. Imagine being that husband that traded his wife, a living soul who loved him, for a handful of smoke—for nothing. Hey, don't be that man. Don't be that woman. You will regret it.

Solomon says, *Don't wait until the top to find out there's nothing there.* This is why we study the Bible. God gives us wisdom. He tries to keep us from making these great mistakes.

Life doesn't make sense *under the sun*—but it makes perfect sense *under the Son, S-O-N.*

Meaning is not found in what you do for yourself—it's found in what you do for the Savior. And Jesus Christ wants us doing things for others. He wants us out there preaching the Gospel to others. He wants us to care for souls and not status.

The Cycle of Chasing Wind

Solomon will go on to describe the endless human treadmill—"The sun rises and sets, the rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full." That's a picture of this that God is showing you today. You can have it all but never be full without God.

People do the same things every generation—work, spend, stress, die—and call it progress. But without God, it's just repetition with better technology. "Oh, we are getting so advanced in this generation." Yeah, well, we still die.

The richest, smartest, most powerful man who ever lived says, "I've been there—and it's empty." Are you hearing me? He said, "I've been there, and it's empty." Do you want to go there?

So if Solomon couldn't find satisfaction in success, what makes us think we will? I can tell you right now that true happiness only comes through Jesus Christ.

God didn't create you for cycles—He created you for calling. You're not meant to chase wind; you're meant to *walk in wisdom.*

Ask God today, "Where am I wasting my energy?" Ask Him to show you. Some of us can't see it. God can. Ask Him to reveal those things to you so you aren't chasing the wind. Once you know what it is, redirect one part of your daily routine to something eternal—prayer, Scripture, service, soul winning.

The Turning Point

Solomon's cry of "vanity" isn't hopeless—it's the starting point of humility. Before God can fill your heart, He has to empty your pride.

Sometimes God has to let your dreams die so your soul can live. I am glad many of my vain dreams have died. When I was a young man, I wanted to be a baseball player so badly. I loved baseball with a passion. I met Pam when I was 16 years old and I started playing so bad. SHE DID THAT TO ME.

But you know what? I gave up that dream for her. She matters. And it wasn't a hard decision. I loved her from the moment I saw her. She has eternal value. Baseball doesn't. I wouldn't have made it anyway, as a baseball player, but I didn't know that at the time. I lost baseball and gained my wife who I love so much. She is mine forever. She is MY WIFE forever.

And yes, I know what the Bible says about this, but I've put my request into God that she be my wife forever. He knows that I love her, and her and I, in heaven, will always have something special between us. And I know we will. I would die for her in a split second without thought.

My personal story: There was a time I chased success—doing more, planning more, trying to prove something. But I reached the top of my own little hill and realized, I'd built a sandcastle in a storm. That's when God said, "Good, now that you've seen what's empty, let Me show you what's eternal." I had a million dollar home. Inside that home is where I slammed my hands on the table in frustration asking God to show me the right way. And He did. And I chose His way. And it was the best decision I've ever made.

That's Solomon's message. He's not mocking you—he's mentoring you.

He's showing that meaning isn't found in achievement, money, careers, homes, and possessions, but in alignment—with God's purpose. Listen, you need to align your plan with God's plan for you and everything will work out to a level you never thought possible.

The Gospel Contrast

The phrase "*under the sun*" appears 27 times in Ecclesiastes. It's the perspective of man looking horizontally, not vertically. Think about that. We're always looking around horizontally for things we want. Instead, we should be looking vertically to the all powerful God in heaven.

Jesus Christ brings a new view—"**under Heaven.**" He lifts your eyes from the temporary to the eternal.

Jesus said, "*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.*" Everything done *for Him* lasts forever. When you work for Him, you might not be getting paid dollars from that timecard, but God is tracking that time. And He pays better than anyone can ever pay. HE'S THE BEST AT PAYING.

Solomon says, “*All is vanity.*” Jesus says, “*Follow Me, and I will give you life more abundantly.*”

Without Christ, life is vanity. With Christ, even the smallest act becomes victory.

Conclusion: From Vanity to Value

Solomon’s opening cry—“*All is vanity*”—isn’t the end of the story; it’s the invitation to start a new one.

He’s shouting across time, “Don’t wait until the end to realize what truly matters.” Meaning isn’t found in what you gain—it’s found in who you know. And God is who you need to know.

Tomorrow at this time, you can either be leading one soul closer to Heaven or one excuse deeper into vanity. Which will it be?

Implementation (Next 24 Hours):

1. Identify one area of vanity—something temporary you’re living for.
2. Replace it with one eternal pursuit.
3. Share that decision with someone this week—declare that you’re done chasing wind.

Next Time We’ll Go Over Song of Solomon 1:1–4

Solomon ends Ecclesiastes staring at a world that can’t satisfy—but in the next book, we see him discover the *only* thing that truly can.

In *Ecclesiastes*, he says, “*All is vanity.*” But in *Song of Solomon*, the Bible whispers, “*Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.*”

He moves from chasing pleasure to **craving presence**. From empty living to intimate love. From “*What’s the point?*” to “*I’ve found the Person.*”

Next time, we’ll open the Song of Solomon—and we’ll find out what happens when a restless heart finally meets the love it was made for.

If Ecclesiastes shows life **without** God, then Song of Solomon shows what life looks like **with** Him.

Don’t miss it—because next service, we’re stepping out of vanity and into victory, out of loneliness and into love divine. You’ve heard Solomon’s cry of emptiness — now hear his song of intimacy.

Let’s pray.