

Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

2:18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

The traditional author of Ecclesiastes is Solomon. But the life events, having been king over Israel in Jerusalem and abdicating the throne to become “the preacher” matches better to the life of Manasseh. He was one of the worst kings, not following the ways of God and is often distinguished as the king who led the kingdom past the point-of-no-return. Israel was doomed because of false worship and debauchery. But he himself repented and “preached” to the people the futility of a life without God. Even with the resources of a king, one cannot find meaning in life without God. The only real meaning to our existence is a right relationship with the true and living God.

All things are vanity on this earth – they are all empty and like chasing after the wind – there is no purpose or end to it. We become like dogs chasing their tail when we seek after the fleeting and perishing things of this world. It is only by living in faith toward God that we can apportion the right mixture of work and pleasure – pleasures given by God; spouse, family, friends, upright work and sharing a right life according to God’s will. It is only by this that life moves to the higher plane of purpose and meaning. There is nothing in this world that is NOT perishing, except what is alive in Christ. We are NOT of the world but still in the world to share the truth of Jesus Christ.

Not coincidentally, the issue “the preacher” is addressing is nihilism. This is the major malaise of the 20th century – after declaring that we evolved from apes, that work and family have no meaning and that truth is subjective – the malaise of the 20th century nihilism has turned into

insanity and darkness in the 21st century. The vain philosophies have crushed the faith for those unwise enough to believe men and not God. But the Good News is that we not only have meaning and purpose in Christ – to proclaim God’s true Word to a fallen creation – but for the repentant sinner in Christ – the relationship with God has been made perfect as it was designed to be. Modern man has made himself the center of his own existence, raised himself on the pedestal and claimed himself to be a “god” – even his own “god.” But deep in his soul is the emptiness of lying to himself and pretending to be happy with material wealth. God is real so there is no real meaning and purpose without Him.

Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Again, these readings are all about having false faith in the things of the creation instead of the Creator! The fleshly pleasures fill the empty void like a drug that causes immediate addiction: processed sugar, nicotine, caffeine, cocaine, heroine. Each pulsating input requires another larger dose. Pornography actually changes how the brain works. Each “stimulation” requires something newer, faster and more potent than the last. The addiction is to the chemicals the brain releases because of the stimulation – but like heroine each fix needs to be more than the last until the organism finds “meaning” in the nothingness of self-deception – an unreal world of fantasy created by the devil as a very comfortable trap for the time being.

We were born anew, born from above in Christ in our baptisms. We have died to the world but have been made alive in Christ. He is the first resurrection and by baptism and we have a share in His resurrection so that the second death has no power over us. But that doesn’t mean that we are no longer in the world where Satan will tempt us in every way to deceive our souls back to slavery to him. We must drown the Old Adam daily – daily struggling against sin and temptation otherwise we break God’s commandments and do the devil’s work. We also must be careful not to be fooled because the devil loves to make us think things we are doing are of God, when they serve only the devil and his kingdom – he lead us by false prophets, causes wars and rumors of wars, causes economic mayhem, and destroys us with poisoning and

diseases. And the true believers will be hated by all for Jesus' names sake, but the one who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 10:22) Many an evil deed is twisted into a "good intention." But the sowing of seeds and reaping of the harvest – bringing more and more people to God's kingdom in the work assigned to all Christians. This brings people the guarantee of life with God because of what Christ has done for us – and it brings us true meaning and purpose – we were designed to live in a right relationship with the true and living God and our neighbor. The baptized are re-created anew in the image of Jesus Christ which gives us this most meaningful work of the proclamation of the truth – salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone and it is in Christ alone.

Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." 16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The treasures and pleasures of this world are all perishing – but in Him we have eternal life with God. The things of this world if taken in sin, selfishness and without thanksgiving toward God – amount to ruin for the person so "lucky" to think he can sit back and have it made. Our relationship with God is one of our constant need of Him. We need Jesus all the time for both our temporal life and eternal life needs. But confidence in the things of this world – money, wealth and stored up goods, ruin that relationship. In thanks to God, we become a "good neighbor." But in selfishness – we serve neither God nor our neighbor. Our purpose and meaning is to grow the kingdom – by the power of God's Holy Spirit to bring more and more people to a right knowledge of the truth – God will hold us accountable – we need forgiveness and to live in Christ!