

When All Has Been Heard
Ecclesiastes 12:9-14
Reading: **Psalm 1**

Bethany Baptist Church
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King Solomon set off in search of *meaning*.

Here was his very *first* word: *vanity*. ... “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity & striving after the wind.*”

Here is his very *last* word: *God*. ... *God shalt thou serve & His commandments shalt thou obey.*

Vanity or God...

So which is it? Or is it, ... *both*?

Turn to Ecclesiastes’ very last lesson; 12:9-14:

Solomon has the **credentials** to sum up the *meaning of life*! He does it in just a few final words for everyone: ***fear & obey the God who is your Judge.***

The Preacher makes *three* last points as finishes his *documentary*.

- 1. Credentials (9-11). So you’ll pay attention.**
- 2. Caveat (12)! Don’t get distracted.**
- 3. Conclusion (13-14). It *isn’t* new & it *isn’t* rocket science & you *can’t afford* to ignore it.**

Life *does* have meaning! It **doesn’t** have to be *vanity*! Your life can be filled with *joy & purpose*!

The Preacher publishes his credentials so you'll pay attention to his conclusion.

1. We've come (9-14) to Solomon's **epilogue** (= *lit. final word*). One last chance to *tell you* what he's been trying (12 ch) to *tell you!* He wants to make sure you *pay attention*, so first he reminds you of his *credentials*.
2. Solomon could have *signed off* as **the king** (*he was!*), but instead he underlines his prophetic role as *the Preacher*.
 - a. That's how he introduced himself in **1:1** & now he's says it **again (3x, vv.8, 9, 10)**. So Solomon concludes his documentary as *the Preacher*.
 - b. The Preacher's **credentials** boil down to this: *hard work (head)*. Solomon pictures himself *working hard* in the *classroom* & in the *library* & in the *pulpit*...
3. The *Preacher* in the *classroom* (9). The Bible assesses Solomon as the wisest man of his times! The *Queen of Sheba* marveled, "*Behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom & prosperity the report which I heard.*"
 - a. Solomon was *all about wisdom*. Can I *define wisdom* one more time: *Wisdom is seeing & responding to life from God's perspective. (2x)*
 - b. Solomon wasn't simply a *sinkhole* for facts – Solomon was keen to *share* what he knew. Solomon was a *teacher*, & that means he had an *audience (class, following)*. People paid attention to this Preacher! Remember the *Queen of Sheba*, and... **1Kg 4:34** – *Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.* That's a pretty good *recommendation*.
4. The *Preacher* spent a lot of time in the *library* (→ *laboratory, field*). His *writing* & his *lectures* & his *preaching* were the products of *diligent study*. He *triple-dips* his efforts (9), Solomon: **pondered, searched out, & arranged**. His Hebr grammar employs a form of each of these **3** verbs that is *forceful*:
 - a. **Pondered** → *pondered diligently* (→ *weighing, balancing*). Speaks of sifting a question until you understand it & have an answer (*like a dog on a bone*). *Pondering* suggests intellectual *integrity & honesty*.

- b. *Searched out* → *searched deeply*. The idea of *thoroughness*. Solomon was never content w/ *superficial explanations*.
- c. *Arranged* → *arranged artfully*. **The French say presentation is everything!** Solomon was an artist, a *word-smith!* Surely our exposition of **Eccl**, or your own reading of the **Prov/Song** argue well for Solomon's *poetic credentials!* No intellectual *hash*, slopped on *paper plate of life & learning!*
- d. **V.9** reminds us that Solomon captured much of this *life-lesson research* in **proverbs** – colorful & provocative nuggets of wisdom. He wrote **3000 (1005 songs)!** Find them on *Spotify!*
5. The *Preacher* worked hard in the *pulpit (lectern, desk, laptop; rd v.10)*.
- a. Some preachers are a little...*dry*. (I know it's true – I catch some of you *nodding off* at times!) Not *this Preacher!* Some preachers are a little...*fanciful (creative interpretation)*. But not **Solomon!**
- b. Solomon's *hard word* in preparing his wisdom for our *eyes & ears* yielded *proverbs & lectures & sermons* that were both *delightful & dependable*.
6. The *Preacher's* hard work *paid off!* Lives were *changed (→ still are)!* **V.11** uses **2 simple pictures** to tell you how: **the goad & the nail**.
- a. Solomon's *wise words* are like **goads**. In Solomon's time a *goad* was a *long stick w/ a sharp point*. You used it to get the ox's *attention!* Today's farmer uses a **cattle prod!** *Goads are good* for getting *Bossy moving*, then keeping her on the *straight & narrow!* The **truth** can do that too! (Truth **hurts** sometimes, too!)
- b. Solomon's *collected sayings* (e.g. *Prov; Eccl*) were like a handful of *well-driven nails* (hit square; sunk deep). **V.11** idea of *nail* is probably a picture of a *tent-peg*. Ever wake up while your tent was *coming up & going away!?!* Godly wisdom keeps your life *nailed down tight!*

7. The Preacher clearly *worked hard*, and that's *important* (*spare us from lazy preachers!*), but Solomon's **real power** was *not* in himself. The source of Solomon's *life-changing wisdom* was the one true **Shepherd** (not the *Preacher*)!
- a. Solomon's been giving us his *credentials*, but He wants you to know that the *Shepherd of Israel* gets the **real credit**.
 - b. Beloved, here (**vv.9-11**) is a *clear illustration* of the **Doctrine of Divine Inspiration**. **Solomon** *hard at work*, but **God** *working thru Solomon*. God *breathing His word* (Gr. *theopneustos*) thru the *labor & lives* of carefully (*divinely*) selected men.
 - c. The result is *delightful & dependable* wisdom (**Scripture**) that is *inspired & inerrant & clear & sufficient & authoritative*.
 - d. The Preacher Solomon could have stated his credentials like this: *I work hard, God works through me, I write His wise words*.
8. I want to *leverage* Solomon's *credentials* to make a couple of *important applications* about *preachers & preaching*.
- a. **1st**. In the *Kingdom*, leaders should be **teachers**. Solomon was a **King** as well as a *Preacher*. Examples of the connection between *leading & teaching* are all over your Bible: *Moses, David, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, Paul – Jesus, the Rabbi from Nazareth*. **NT elders** (pastors) were required to be *able to teach*; they were *pastor-teachers*.
 - b. **2nd**. *Preaching/teaching* the truth is critical to God's people. Many churches today *minimize the pulpit* (max *music & entertainment*). Preachers *download* someone else's sermon from web & preach *sermonettes for Christianettes*.
 - i. The goal of every biblical *pastor-teacher* (see **v.10!**) should be to preach messages that are **correct, clear, compelling!**
 - ii. Beloved, please pray that **I** would attain to such *anointed preaching*.

Solomon had these credentials!

Caveat (warning)! Don't get distracted...

1. In this day of hi-tech *self-publishing*, up to **1 mill** books are published each year! Read them all = knock out almost **3000/day!** Solomon says it would be a *bad idea!* **Read v.12.**
2. What is the *point* of the Preacher's warning? Solomon is clearly **not anti-intellectual** (cf **vv.9&10**). He's obviously in favor of *his own writing* (& he wrote a lot). How do we understand **v.12?**
3. Scripture seems to be warning you against *the wrong* books. Solomon wants you to aspire to *his writings*, but to be guarded about all the tiresome *alternatives*.
 - a. There is **no end** to *writing & reading*. Remember Solomon's personal penmanship stat: **3000 prov & 1005 songs (1 Kg 4:32)**. That's a *bunch!* Other books require all the same effort, but yet can't *hold a candle* to the *divinely inspired wisdom* of authors such as Solomon, *controlled* by the one, true Shepherd! Why should you be *distracted* by a task or a tome that has *no end & lacks God's imprimatur?*
 - b. There is **no rest** from excessive *writing & reading*. Solomon's own *writing credentials* point to the *toil* involved in *research & writing*. What is the point if God & His wisdom are nowhere to be found in the pages of what you *produce!?! → grow in grace*
4. The bottom line is that Solomon has spent a *lifetime* researching the **one truth** that really matters. He doesn't want *false teaching & frivolous distractions* to **woo you away from the message...**
5. Can I ask you a question? ***What's on your reading list this winter?*** Will your reading selections help you?
 - a. Brothers, does it *build you up* to read **one page** every morning of your Bible, & **25 pages** of your favorite *sports car* or *golf journal*?
 - b. Sisters, does it *feed your soul* to *suck down romance novels like hot cup of Darjeeling*, yet **never** read a real Christian book?

Solomon says be warned...don't be distracted from life's most important message & the Holy Book that teaches it!

So in conclusion, what is the secret of happiness (key to fulfillment, the source of joy, the antidote to vanity?) What is the secret ... ?

1. Did you ever find Eccl to be a little *baffling*? Hint: putting your arms around Solomon's documentary is an exercise in *first words & last words*. **Let's read them again (1:1-3; 12:13a)**. *First words* tell you where the author thinks he's *headed*. *Last words* tell you *where he finally arrived*.
 - a. Solomon's *first word* is **vanity** (30+x in Eccl). To be *pointless* or *profitless*. And don't miss that *key phrase* (3b): "*under the sun*"! Life lived *horizontally*. Live pursued as if *God isn't there* or *doesn't care*.
 - b. But the *last word* on wisdom is to **look up**. Nothing you can pursue *under the sun* holds the answer! Don't ignore God, **fear Him!** *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God.*
 - c. You have to bring both of these *together*. Life is vain *unless...pause*.
2. The key to living the *fulfilled life* can be summed up in **2 interlocking instructions (13): fear & obey**. The reason to take Solomon's conclusion seriously is **1 sobering motivation: comprehensive judgment**.
3. **Fulfillment** is a journey that begins with **fear!** (Read v.13.)
 - a. Solomon's writing is *emphatic & intentional*; lit. **God thou shalt fear & His commandments thou shalt keep**.
 - b. Why "*fear God*"? Because *the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*. Look at all the *shipwrecked lives* around you (Rm 3:18 – the *foolish don't fear God*). But a *meaningful life* demands *wisdom*. And wisdom **begins** with a *holy fear of the LORD*.
 - c. Solomon's **order (13)** is important: *fearing God* goes **before** *obeying God*. We could also say *worship precedes service*.

- d. Some translations suggest the idea of inserting “*applies to*” or “*duty*” at the end of **v.13 (NASB – because this *applies to* every person.)** That’s *not* in the original text.
 - e. **Better:** ... *this is the whole (entirety) of every person. I.e, fear & obedience are the essence of every man. Humanity’s identity (purpose, fulfillment) boils down to fearing & obeying God. →*
 - f. God made you & His *designer label* is *hand-sewn* on your soul. You can’t *remove* it! Woe to you if you *try*! You were *created (wired) to worship & serve your King.*
1. Solomon concludes his conclusion with a **reason...a warning (For...).**
Read v.14.
- a. Here are words that are *goads & penetrating nails* indeed ! They echo the Preacher’s warning to *young adults* back in **11:9**. The Bible says *is nothing* in your *past or present* you can hide from God.
 - b. **Good acts?** Are you *servicing* Him? But does it seem like *no one notices*? Does it seem like it *doesn’t bear much fruit*. Does *good* seem to be *going of style*? **God sees (every act)!** Don’t *grow weary* of doing well. *God fear ... His word obey ... He sees it all!*
 - c. **Evil acts?** Have you *disobeyed* God? You can *confess*. You can *repent* of it. **You can be forgiven (2x)**. But you can’t *hide* it. **God will judge**. The only thing that *covers sin* is the blood of Jesus (*died in our place to pay for our sins*).
 - i. Examples: One of Eccl fav themes is the *abuse of power*. Sometimes it seems the *powerful & the wealthy* will never be called to accounts. *But they will.*
 - ii. **2nd example:** The *young* are encouraged to *pursue their desires*. **But desire should be rooted in the fear of God (2x)**, because **God will judge even what He seems to encourage.**

When all has been heard, here’s what the Preacher discovered in his search for meaning: Life is vain unless you fear & obey your Maker & Judge.

Don’t be distracted another day. Worship & serve Him now! ...pray...