

“The Same Old Thing”
Ecclesiastes 1:5-11
(Preached at Trinity, March 26, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Ecclesiastes is in the form of a sermon. Solomon, the Preacher, is preaching to us all.
Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NAU - "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
 - A. The theme is expressed at the beginning
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
It is expressed in sixteen verses—five times in **Verse 2**.
And in the final chapter Solomon concludes:
"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"
 - B. The word literally refers to a vapor or mist. Something that quickly fades away, like your breath on a cold winter morning.
 - C. The word can also mean, “useless, futile, empty, vain.”
 - a. The scope is universal. ALL is vanity. Solomon has in mind all that comprises a man's life. During the course of this Book Solomon will approach the subject from the many aspects of our life.
 - b. His point is not that all life is meaningless. Solomon will argue that life without God is meaningless. He'll stress the emptiness and vanity of this world; of what happens when we choose what this world has to offer instead of what God provides; seeking our own way instead of seeking God's way.
2. The first area that Solomon focuses is our earthly work, the labors that are the focus of our life.
 - A. To what advantage is it? Is there any profit in it?
Ecclesiastes 1:3 NAU - "What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?"
What “advantage?” What “profit?”
It is a rhetorical question with the expectation of a negative answer.
There is no value, all is vanity.
 - B. Remember, Solomon has a particular theme in this Book. Life apart from God has no meaning. Nothing else really matters.
In the course of this Book Solomon will outline several reasons why all is vain.
3. The first problem with our labors is the brevity of life
Ecclesiastes 1:4 NAU - "A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever."
There are countless generations of men.
 1. People come and go and are soon forgotten.
 2. Of all our pride in the things we accomplish is vanity. Without eyes fixed upon God with a hope of eternity, all is vain.
“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity”

3. Solomon's point in this Book is that life only has value when we live with our focus on God.
Ecclesiastes 12:13 NAU - "The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person."
Ecclesiastes 12:13 KJV - "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man."
4. Philip Ryken says it well – “When we look to God with reverence and awe, we are able to see the meaning of life, and the beauty of its pleasures, and the eternal significance of everything we do, including the little things of everyday life. Only then can we discover why everything matters.”¹
4. As we continue in **Chapter 1**, Solomon gives us another reason why there is futility to a life lived without God. Everything is an endless cycle of change but there is nothing new.
Ecclesiastes 1:9 NAU - "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun."
- I. In all of the human labors upon the earth, there is the lack of anything new. Nothing changes.
 - A. The labors we do today have been repeated over and over throughout history
Ecclesiastes 1:8 NAU - "All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell *it*."
Ecclesiastes 1:9 NAU - "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun."
 1. Solomon directs our attention upon nature.
Ecclesiastes 1:5 NAU - "Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there *again*."
 a. The sun has risen and set every day since the beginning of time. We read in the Genesis account:
Genesis 1:5 NAU - "God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day."
 b. The winds blow, the rivers flow.
 Nothing changes. There is a constant cycle of seasons, winter and summer—cold and heat.
 c. The same is true with earthly labors.
 2. Solomon doesn't draw a strict distinction between the past and the future. The future is merely a repetition of the past.
 3. You say, but we have computers, cars, smartphones. Technology has exploded. Our labors are greatly different from farmers and hunters of old. Yes, but the essence of our labors are the same. We labor today, sleep tonight, and awaken tomorrow to repeat the process.
 4. The essence is the same, we labor to provide our earthly needs. There is nothing new in that. We receive our wages, spend them and then repeat our labors.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 21.

B. This is the refrain of Solomon

Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 NAU - "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new "? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us."

1. Without Christ everything disintegrates to the mundane
Vanity of vanities.

Verse 8 – "All things are wearisome.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 NAU - "All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing."

2. We must follow the example of our Lord. For Jesus, everything was summed up in doing the will of the Father.

John 4:34 NAU - "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

II. The thing human beings fear is a life that has become mundane

A. Solomon describes the stagnant nature of this world

Ecclesiastes 1:5-7 NAU - "Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there *again*. ⁶ Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns. ⁷ All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again."

1. Solomon describes the repeating rhythm of nature. The sun rises and sets, the wind blows, the rivers flow.

Ecclesiastes 1:5 NAU - "the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there *again*."

2. The sun moves across the sky as the minutes and hours pass.

The rivers flow into the ocean, the wind blows.

3. There is constant repetition.

Nature goes through its constant cycles, constant change – and yet nothing changes. The rivers flow endlessly into the ocean but the ocean is never full. Vanity, futility – the rivers flow endlessly and never fill the ocean.

B. Such is the case with our labors. It is all mundane.

1. We rise early, put in our day's work, go to bed and then repeat it the next day. It is the same old thing day in and day out.

- a. The office worker returns to the same old cubicle to do the same old thing.

- b. The teacher returns to face the same unruly class. No one appreciates her labors.

- c. The stay-at-home mom does the same chores everyday. She prepares meals, changes diapers, does laundry, dusts, sweeps and mops, helps with homework – each and every day.

- d. The carpenter drives another nail, raises another wall – actions that are repeated on and on.

2. Without God it is just a mundane existence, without purpose, without direction. A life from nowhere, going nowhere with nothing in between.
- C. The life in Christ is a life of direction, of purpose. Nothing is mundane.
1. We need to look at God's call upon the early priesthood, the sons of Levi.

Exodus 6:16 NAU - "These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari" God gave each of these sons of Levi specific duties, duties to be performed over and over—doing the same thing with endless repetition.

 - a. Gershon - The Gershonites were in charge of the tabernacle curtains.
 - b. Kohath – The Kohathites were in charge of the interior furnishings and utensils including the Ark
 - c. Merari – The sons of Merari were in charge of the manual labor – they were responsible for all of the structural components of the tabernacle – the tents, ropes, pegs, boards and all the equipment. They transported the tabernacle, set it up and then took it down.
 2. These were all God-ordained duties. For some they may have seemed mundane.
 - a. Caring for curtains as your life's work may not seem like an exciting trade.
 - b. Cleaning the tabernacle utensils and caring for the furnishings may not have seemed all that important.
 - c. All of the manual labor involved in transporting and setting up and taking down the tabernacle may have been difficult work
 3. But this was God's work
 - a. The Israelites gave great honor to the Levites
 - b. The Levites also saw their work as glorious work because it was God's work. The Kohathites would later write,

Psalms 84:10 NAU - "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand *outside*. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness."
 4. A life of purpose before God is a full life. A life without the sense of God's calling is meaningless. As Solomon would say:

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

Conclusion:

1. We must view everything through the lens of the Gospel. In Christ nothing is mundane. In Christ all things are new. His work is making all things new.
 1. He has inaugurated the New Covenant through His blood.
 2. In the Gospel we have been made new.
2 Corinthians 5:17 NAU - "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
 3. He has promised eternal newness.
Revelation 21:5 NAU - "And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."
2. The life in Christ is one of richness, of fullness. It is a life lived to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor. It is a life that learns to look beyond self and the tedium of life to the fullness of God's image shining in and through us. It is a life at peace. The life Paul describes:
1 Timothy 2:2 NAU - "that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."