

Life without Christ is Meaningless

Series: The Greener Grass Syndrome

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Text: Ecclesiastes 1:1-8

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We have two more messages in Nehemiah that I will be giving on the next two Sunday evenings.

Tonight I want to begin a series called “The Greener Grass Syndrome”. The teaching will come out of the book of Ecclesiastes. We will cover chapter 1 tonight. There are twelve messages in the series.

You’ve heard the saying: “**The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence**”? What do we mean by that? When we are unsatisfied with life, we tend to dream of a better place that will take away all our problems. When we feel lonely, desperate, and exhausted we tend to dream of all the possibilities in life that are really not realistic. We dream of a new job that will make everything better. We might even dream of a special person coming into our lives to make everything better. Some might dream about how they might get out of their circumstances. Why? Because life is not satisfying. That is, it is not satisfying unless Christ IS your life.

In other words, there is no greener grass on this earthly life apart from Christ. There is no fullness of joy apart from His presence. You must find your contentment in Christ. If you want greener grass, then water your own grass with all the water Christ has to offer. Find contentment in Christ! You’ll hear that over and over again in this series.

I. Let’s look first at **THE MAN** who wrote this book (1:1, 12).

A. He calls himself a **preacher**.

Verse 1, “The words of the Preacher...” He is a wise sage, one who knows much. Solomon we know was the wisest man in all the world outside of Jesus Christ. Solomon you’ll remember was given one wish from God, and he could have anything. **1 Kings 3:5**, “In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.” Since he chose *wisdom* over and above a long life or riches, God gave him all three.

B. He calls himself a **king** and introduces himself as King David’s son—quite obviously this is Solomon—he notes that he once ruled over Israel.

Verse 1, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”.

Verse 12, “I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.”

His point in bringing up these lofty qualifications is not a spirit of pride, but a desire to show us how he as the king had unlimited resources to investigate the best life had to offer. He’s stating his qualifications and saying, I’ve been all there is to be and done all there is to do, and it’s all vain.

By the way, it is ok to state your qualifications, but we are not to boast in doing so. Someone may have earned a degree in a college, or a certificate of learning. It's ok to mention that as long as it is without pride or boasting. We are recognizing a gift from God and the person's responsibility to be a good steward with what God has given him.

- C. In all likelihood, Ecclesiastes is Solomon's **last writing** after he had dabbled with every kind of sin and come to repentance.

King Solomon began his reign as a humble servant of the Lord, seeking God's wisdom and help (**1 Kings 3:5–15**). As he grew older, his heart turned away from Jehovah to the false gods of the many wives he had taken from foreign lands (**1 Kings 11:1ff**).

So this is an old man, given much time to ponder after wandering terribly away from God. He's done it all. He experienced every idol from fame to sex to power to money. And all of it without God is painful and vain. He writes this from a perspective "preacher" not in the sense of the ordained office, but as one who has repented and learned from his sins and found God to be gracious. What does this tell us?

1. You need to know that there is no more **gracious**, forgiving, merciful and kind hearted being in all the universe than God almighty. The tragedies of sin are unspeakable. But "where sin abounds, grace much more abounds" (**Romans 5:20**). So Solomon is eminently qualified to tell you that life without your Creator, who we know from the New Testament is Christ—Life without Christ is Empty!

We get this from the last chapter. He says in **Ecclesiastes 12:13**, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." This is beautiful. Don't look for greener grass! Serve God where you are with what He's given you. Stop looking for greener grass!

Can you think of places in the Bible that tell us that God is our all?

2. You need also to remember that as great as His mercy is, so are the **consequences** of ignoring God's offer. God will not force you to go His way. You can go your own way for as long as you want. But it will never get any better. Christ alone can fill us. He can change us. But He wants not only to change us, but to realize valuable truths from it. You can become wiser and stronger in spite of selfish, sinful choices. God is in the business of turning tragedies into triumphs, tax collectors into teachers, adulterers into His holy servants. Every one of us deal with the deep temptations to addictions in our

lives. You ask, ok, there are addictions in my life, but how do I let go of those addictions and lay hold on God as my all in all?

I'm glad you asked. That's what we are going to learn in this series.

- II. The first step to being filled by Christ is by seeing the **MADNESS** of life (1:2–11, 14–15, 17–18). There is no greener grass without Christ.

In fact, a preliminary investigation into this chapter quickly reveals some bitter truths about life without Christ. It's ugly. Life without Christ is a chocolate covered roach. It's sweet on the outside, but ugly on the inside.

The promises of life apart from Christ are deceitful. In every false idol there is both **ecstasy** and **agony**. You have pleasure in sin for a season, and it is ecstasy, but then it doesn't fulfill and it is agony. Apart from Christ, life is a roller coaster of ecstasy and agony. In Christ, life is filled with the steady stream of love, joy, and peace. There is a purpose to all the madness. Without Christ all you have is madness and addiction. The madness of life makes people do all kinds of things.

- Life is hard, and men turn to pornography and lust. Women may turn to romance novels. Soon their marriage is on the rocks or destroyed altogether.
- When life is hard it pushes people to be TV zombies, or over eating, or addictions of all kinds. Some girls turn to anorexia or bulimia. Young people are committing fornication all over the place, and they live on the ecstasy of "secret waters".
- Look at **Proverbs 9:17-18**, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. 18 But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." Looking for greener grass eventually kills you, because you miss Christ.

A. Without Christ there is no real purpose in life (1:2–7, 14, 17). There's this drive in us to better ourselves. To make something of ourselves. God put within us a conscience to tell us that we ought to reflect Him and that we are failing miserably. We were created to be image bearers of God. C.S. Lewis said there were two main pillars to the futility of life without Christ. "First, that human beings all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, they do not in fact behave in that way."

Because our purpose was to live for Christ, and that purpose is in every human being's heart, they look for something to live for. But everything outside of Christ is vain.

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

1. What is Solomon saying?

- (1.) **He's not a bitter old man just being pessimistic and grouchy.** He's warning here. He's essentially saying that whatever is done selfishly and simply to enjoy as an end in and of itself always disappoints.

In other words, the promises of money, sex, and power are all empty outside of God.

- (2.) **The New Testament carries this theme in many places.**
- a. **Mark 8:36**, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" What's the answer? Nothing. You gaining the whole world will be vanity! It's all vanity.
- b. Paul put it this way in **Romans 8:20-21** puts it this way, "For the creature [speaking of the entire CREATION] was made subject to vanity [there's our word], not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature [CREATION] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." In other words, there is something wrong—there is a vanity to all things going on and on and on, but one day, Christ is going to redeem the creation for Himself. We are going to find out that the only way to get out of the vanity is to start living for Christ. It's the reason we were created.
- c. Paul gets even more graphic and specific concerning the vanity of life in **Philippians 3:8**, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." According to Paul, life without Christ is not only vanity, it is dung, i.e. refuse. It's sewage!
- You single people might think marriage will solve your problems. If your motive is not Christ, it's sewage!
 - You married people might say, "I married the wrong person".
 - You might think, "I know my life will be better when I get that promotion. It'll solve so many problems".
 - You might think, "If only I had a better job".
 - "If only I had a better relationship with my parents".

- If you are thinking, FILL IN THE BLANK will solve my problems, and that blank is not filled with Christ, you have entered into idolatry of the heart.

(3.) Someone said it this way, “**Only one life. ‘Twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last**”.

2. Without Christ there is **no real purpose** in life. Nothing changes.

B. **Without Christ there is lasting work in life.** Verse 3. “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” Your work without Christ is the same as all the others. Whether you are filthy rich or a poor person, your work is vain without Christ. What is one king among a thousand? They did all their work and it was all in vain if they were without Christ. What do you do for a living? There are a thousand others that do the same thing. If you die, someone will take your place. Even if you think you’ve made a difference, without Christ, your life and your work doesn’t matter in the end.

C. **Without Christ life is meaningless monotony.** A purposeless life is not worth living.

1. Nature cycles, but if there is no purpose to it, it’s all vain.

- (1.) **History moves on.** Verse 4a, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh”
- (2.) **The Earth remains.** Verse 4b, “...but the earth abideth for ever.”
- (3.) **The sun rises.** Verse 5, “The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.”
- (4.) **The wind blows.** Verse 6, “The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.”
- (5.) **The rivers run.** Verse 7, “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again”

Application: We might put it this way—you get up and go to work every day. You eat, you sleep, you work, you go on vacation, you do it again and again, and then you die. What’s the point. If we have no cosmic purpose, then life is meaningless!

That goes for the Christian. Anything attempted in the flesh is wasted. We could lay up treasure in heaven. We could have lasting fruit in eternity.

Life is only meaningless and unsatisfying if we leave God out of the picture. Consider that when we see the sun rise and the wind blow on each new day, we can say “Great is Thy faithfulness!” (**Lamentation 3:23**).

2. Solomon tells us that it is **weary** trying to explain this to people, because they don't get it! **Verse 8**, “All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”

Evangelism is hard on this earth. You try to tell people that life without God is vain, and it is wearisome because they are so busy trying to fill their eyes and ears to satisfy them. This is why we have 24 hour news and movies coming out every other day. “...the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”

Man's appetite is never filled or satisfied apart from God. To try to explain this to people is wearisome.

III. WHERE EXACTLY IS **HAPPINESS** FOUND?

Let's look at some examples.

- A. **Abraham. Genesis 15:1**, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”
- B. **Asaph**. Remember he looked on the wicked prospering and was angry until he realized God was enough. **Psalm 73:25**, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”
- C. **David**.
 - **Psalm 1:1**, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”
 - **Psalm 34:8**, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”
 - **Psalm 16:11**, “...in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”
- D. **Paul**.
 - **1 Timothy 6:6**, “But godliness with contentment is great gain”.
 - **Colossians 2:10**, “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power”.
- E. **Jesus**.
John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”.

John 13:17, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” Have you ever been driving, listening to the radio, and the signal gets mixed? Trying to serve God in a day of media is like getting a mixed signal. You hear the Word, but it has no power because it’s mixed with all kinds of stuff that God is no OK with. We need to clean up our signal! We need to get a stronger signal and cut off all the competing signals.

- Ask yourself—am I more concerned about the news than the good news?
- Does surfing the internet put information that causes me to sin?

Psalm 101:3, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.”

It is knowing Christ and walking in obedience to Christ that will bring spiritual joy—the ecstasy of sin is DULL compared to our JOY in Christ!

Conclusion: So, do you want greener grass? You have to water your own lawn. Don’t look for a person or a job or anything else in this world for greener grass. That’s all covetousness, and it cannot deliver. They are all empty fantasies and promises that will never come true. You must water your own heart with the water of God’s presence, the joy of reading His Word and hearing His voice.