

SERMON 17th JANUARY 2021
Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Friends:

How “often” we use “words” like futile, pointless, aimless, empty, hollow, purposeless, valueless, worthless, inconsequential, fruitless and unprofitable!

- Life often seems “futile” and “what is the point of it”?
- Why did I have to go through that time of suffering and sickness?
- Does “life” have “meaning” and lasting value?
- Well to “find a book” in the Bible that “also” “explores” these “deep questions” about our “existence” is surprising and encouraging and must be looked at as a true word from God placed in Scripture by the Holy Spirit for our spiritual growth in grace and love!
- Verse 1:
“The words of the Teacher, son of David, King of Jerusalem: (2)
“Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”
- There’s a certain “mystery” about how the “author” “announces” himself; he comes “almost” but “not quite” to the point of calling himself “Solomon”!
- Solomon’s “name” never occurs in the book, yet “Proverbs” and “song of songs” use it openly in claiming him as “their” “author”!
- He “writer” of Ecclesiastes is “Teacher or Preacher”!
- The “writer” is “one” who “convenes” a group “for” “teaching or worship”!
- “Solomon”, as the most gifted man conceivable, who could outstrip every king who ever occupied the throne of David, would “still return” “empty-handed” from the quest for “self-fulfillment”!
- Solomon’s “authorship” gives us a “portrait” of a scholar whose “vocation” is teaching, research, editing and creative writing. He is both sensitive, courageous and a master of style!
- **“MEANINGLESS!”**
 - Vanity of vanities!
 - All is vanity!
 - Everything is “futile”!
 - “It is of no use!”
 - “All is for nothing!”
 - “A wisp of vapour!”
 - “A pull of wind!”
 - A mere breathe!
 - “Nothing” you could get your hands on; the nearest thing to “zero”.

- The “book ends” in Chapter 12:8 with almost “identical words”: “Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”
- “Vanity, meaningless” is the “central theme” of the Book of Ecclesiastes!
- This word “vanity: appears almost “40” times in the book!
- The word in context means that which “lacks meaning or value”, that which has “no substance” or that which is “temporal and short lived”!
- Verse 3:
“What do people “gain” from all their “labours” at which they “foil” “under the sun”?
- The Teacher is “highlighting” the “failure” of “secularism”!
- Don’t put your “confidence” in the things of “this” world!
- ‘Gain’ is a commercial term; “life” pays “no dividends”!
- If the “earthly life” is subject to “vanity”, there is “no hope” of finding ultimate gain or satisfaction from its resources!
- “Labour” is “physical” toil or “mental” anguish!

Friends:

If your “view of life” goes “no further” than “under the sun”, all your endeavours will have an undertone of “misery”!

- Perfection “cannot” be found in an “imperfect” world!
- “Vanity and Meaningless” characterizes man and the “realm” he occupies and dominates!
- If man’s “resources” are entirely “this-worldly”! “No profit” is the “motto” over all he does!
- “Of course” there is another realm altogether that the Teacher will share later when he will speak of “God” who may be approached and worshipped!
(Ch. 5:1-7)
- “However” the Teacher will thoroughly “explore” the “abyss of pessimism” that this world offers! “Before” he gets to Chapter 5!
- Verse 4:
“Generations come and generations go, “but” the earth remains for ever!”
- You spend your life “working”, laboring, and what do you have to “show” for it?
- Mankind’s “problem” is further aggravated by the “contrast” between the “brevity of life” and the “apparent” “permanence” of the earthly realm!

- “Forever” means that “under the sun” there is “no conceivable end” to the problem of “earthly futility”!
- We all know that generations “come” and generations “go” and “our” generation too is passing away! We all understand that we can’t take our “cars and boats”, our “shares and money” to Heaven; they have “no” use in Heaven!
- When you look at your “family history genealogy” you can “see” all your “ancestors”!
- You only have to go back a few generations and see my relatives that I “never” met or knew! I know they existed, their names appear on birth certificates and marriage certificates, but I know “nothing” about their lives or legacy! I am “here” this morning ‘because’ of them, but that’s “about it”!
- I “often” wonder what part of my efforts at life and ministry will “remain” “after” I have gone: this is the type of question the Teacher wants us to ask and provoke in us!

Friends:

What will happen to all your “STUFF” when you “disappear” from this broken world?

- Kristian Bush, An American singer-songwriter sums this verse up well in his song “Trailer Hitch”!
“I don’t know why, know why, Everybody wanna die “rich”: Champagne, new plane: Work your way down the list. We try, everybody tries. Tries to fit into that ditch. You can’t take it with you when you go. “Never” seem a “hearse” with a trailer hitch!”
- Verse 5 to 7 reveal an ever present turmoil of activity; however “devoid of progress”!
- There is “no gain” for man in his foil, similarly” there is “no gain” for creation in her foil!
- “Three” examples are given!
 1. the repetitious cycles of the “sun”! Just like a runner on a circular track! **(V5)**
 2. the “wind” blowing round its circuits to no apparent purpose! **(V6)**
 3. the “waters” gushing into the seas without ever finding their task accomplished! **(V7)**
- The Old Testament says that “CREATION” rings with the “praises of the LORD”!
- Creation “belongs” to God!
- Clouds, storms, thunder, lightning, snow, all are within His control!
- The “fertility” of men, animals and plants are His to withhold or to give!
- God sets the bounds to the seas, orders summer and winter, makes the sun rule the day, the moon, the night, and brings out the stars by number!

- “But” the Teacher says, “take away its God” and “creation” no longer reflects God’s glory; it illustrates the “weariness of mankind”!
- The “rivers” perpetually flow but make “no progress” in filling the sea!
- Our lives often feel like that; we work, we go home, we eat and sleep, and we go to work again, go home, eat, sleep, when does it all finish?
- Verse 8:
“All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The “eye” never has enough of seeing, nor the “ear” its fill of hearing!”
- The Message translation puts it brilliantly:-
“Everything’s boring, utterly boring – no one can find any meaning in it!” Boring to the eye, boring to the ear!” (V8)
- In “Verses 8 to 11” Solomon brings “human experience” to the reader’s attention!
- “All things” are full of “weariness”!
- We reach the end of the week worn out! Then we start a new week and on it goes!
- The end of the “month”, the end of the “year”, the “same consideration” faces us!
- As with the “course of nature: there are “3” characteristics of this experience!
- It is “repetitive”; it is “ordinary” and it is apparently “profitless”!
- As that “saying says”:
“Another day older and deeper in debt!”
- It’s no wonder that the existentialist lists “boredom” as one of the chief characteristics of life.
- Verse 8:
“the eye “never” has enough of seeing!”
- These days people have thousands of “pictures” on their phones and computer “BUT” they still want “more”!
- People have thousands of “songs” on their digital platforms BUT still want more!
- We all seem to have an innate “dissatisfaction” with what we have!
- Verse 9:
“There is “nothing new” under the sun”!”
- Solomon is talking about “human nature”! Throughout the “millennia” it has “not” changed or improved!

- Many people throughout in the 19th century that the human race was moving towards a “golden age”, the promise of a new day, where there would be a “real improvement” in the human race! “Slavery” had been abolished, “industrial revolution” was improving the lives of many; “then” at the beginning of the 20th Century, the First World War (the war to end all wars!) took place and the liberal hope for the “golden age” was put on hold!
- Popular novelist “Kathe Koja” has claimed to spin her tales from threads of “bleak nothingness”!
- She speaks of a “black hole” that is at the “heart” of every novel!
- The “emptiness” we each carry close to our hearts; the emptiness of being alive in a world that doesn’t care!
- “Koja” says if you stuff enough things down that “hole” our society “believes” you can finally satisfy it into silence!
- She says that has never been the case! Creativity, sex, art; not even “love” can “fill that hole”!
- “Solomon” would have “agreed”!
- In the first “seven verses” Solomon tells us that life is “futile”, now in verses 8-11, Solomon tells us that life is also “FRUSTRATING”!
- The natural outgrowth of futility is “frustration”!
- All around us we see frustrated people!
- “Road rage” on our roads!
- “Shooting sprees” in schools and offices, “hopelessness” in the hearts of individuals: in “2019” in Australia “3,318” took their “own lives”!
- Solomon moves from the evidence of “futility”; to the evidence of “frustration” when “God” is “removed” from the picture!
- The ultimate “put-down” in today’s society is to say we are experiencing “BOREDOM”! Yet everyone seems afflicted by it!
- We can never “see” enough or “hear” enough to bring satisfaction!
- Our entire “entertainment industry” rests on this premise!
- “Billions of dollars” are spent annually around the world on producing and purchasing “entertainment”!
- Some people track their lives on the basis of sports: cricket for summer, footy for winter, racing car tour throughout the year!

- It's interesting to think about that even during a "pandemic", sport was "allowed" in Australia, even when most other things were "banned"!
- "Michael CRIGHTON", American author and filmmaker, who has sold over 200 million copies worldwide, and a dozen or so have been "adapted" into film!
- One of his "characters" "Robert Doniger", CEO of an enormous technology company addresses his workers:
"In "other centuries"; human beings wanted to be 'saved', or 'improved', or 'freed', or 'educated'! But in "our century", they want to be "ENTERTAINED"! The great fear is not of disease or death but of "BOREDOM". A sense of time on our hands, a sense of nothing to do! A sense that we are not amused! But where will this "mania for entertainment" "end?""
- In "1958", Barnaby Conrad was badly "gored" in a bullfight in Spain! Eva Gabor and Noel Coward were overheard talking about this "incident"
"Noel, dharling", said Eva, "have you heard the news about poor Barnaby? He was terribly "gored" in Spain!"
"He was what?" asked Coward in alarm!
"He was "gored"!"
"Thank heavens, I thought you said "BORED"!"
- In fact there is "wisdom" there!
- "Ultimate boredom" – the "fate" of those who can look only under the "sun for meaning – may be the worst fate of all!
- Verse 9:
"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is "nothing" new under the sun!"
- Solomon says, "nothing is fresh!"
- History merely repeats itself!
- It has "all" been done before!
- Chris Ross" filed this 'last column' for the "Jacksonville Daily Progress"
"If I've learned anything in my days at the Progress, its there really "isn't anything new" under the sun! The longer I worked as a reporter; the more I realized I'm doing the same stories over and over. Some of the names and places and even motives would change, but essentially it was the same old thing!"
- Solomon's "conclusion" so fare is that life under the sun, with its mechanical repetition, is all "vanity"!
- "Nothing" is "satisfying" and nothing is "new", and nothing is "remembered"!

- Verse 11:
“No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them!”
- Do you “know” who “Chris Watson” and “George Reid” were?
- The 3rd and 4th Australian “Prime Minister”: 114 days and 322 days in office respectively!
- “Consider” this lead paragraph from a story in the British newspaper the Daily Telegraph of February 4th 2008:

“A fifth of British teenagers believe Sir Winston Churchill was a fictional character, while many think Sherlock Holmes, King Arthur and Eleanor Rigby were “real”, a survey shows!”
- Even those ‘things’, ‘events’, and ‘people’ that we think are so “important” today will be largely forgotten fifty years from now; let alone “3 millennia” from now!
- These opening verses, “1-11”, paint a “grim” picture of our reality!
- Repetition, mundaneness, apparent lack of profit or progress characterizes not only “nature” but “human experience” as well!
- The fact is the billions of people who live on planet earth most will make “no” apparent “impact” at all!
- They will live, die and be immediately “forgotten” by ALL but their closest friends and relatives!
- This “isn’t” exactly the news we want to wake up to, but it is the ‘cold reality’ that Solomon wants to ensure his readers don’t forget!
- Solomon is “not” interested in “sugar-coating” life!
- He wants us to “see” the situation as “is”: and how the “problem” might be fixed!
- What about the “gospel of Christ” in this book?

Friends:

Ecclesiastes “shows” us the world “Christ came to save”!

- It is the world Christ came to inhabit!
- For the “sake of His people” Jesus “submitted” himself to ‘this life’: with its ‘repetition’, its ‘ordinariness’, its seeming failure to make any progress!

- What happened in the “Washington DC not” last week, will happen again, somewhere else in the world, a different country, a different time: so when “this vision” of life brings you frustration, and disappointment, remember that Christ did not come to make you successful in this life, but to “save” you from its evil and fallenness (and your own sin) and to bring you into a world where nothing is ordinary and where everything is “NEW”!
(REV. 21:5)
- Solomon would later “summarize” the “central question” of his book this way:
(in Ch. 6:12)
“For “who” knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are “gone”?”
- There is only “son Person” who knows!
- Solomon will tell us in Chapter 3:11 “God has also set “eternity” in the human heart!”
- The “E” for “eternity” is engraved permanently within you, and it “won’t” let you be “content” as an earthbound creature!
- God has “made” us all in “such a way” that until we return home to the arms of our Heavenly Father, we would be like the “prodigal son”, a miserable and misplaced heir to a lost kingdom!
- “Howard Mumma was a pastor who served as a guest minister at the “American Church in Paris”!
- On Sunday after the service he noticed people gathering around a man in a dark suit. The man was “Albert Camus”, a famous philosopher, author and journalist. He had begun attending church to listen to the organ but continued attending listening to Mumma’s sermons! Camus won the 1957 Nobel Prize for literature!
- “Mumma and Camus” became friends in spite of the gulf that separated their beliefs and their notoriety! Their discussions centred around Camus’ questions of “religious belief”!
- Camus passed away in 1960, and Pastor Mumma at the age of “92” finally went on the record, about his “conversations” with the French philosopher!
- Camus said to the Pastor:
“the reason I have been coming to church is “because” I am seeking. I’m almost on a pilgrimage – seeking “something” to fill the “void” that I am experiencing – and no one else knows!
- He continues:
“I am searching for something that the world is not giving me. The world in which we live and the lives which we live are decidedly “empty”!”

- Camus said:
*“Since I have been coming to church, I have been thinking a great deal about the idea of a “transcendent something” that is “other” than this world!
Perhaps we are the only ones who have ever asked the great questions of life! On Sunday mornings, I hear the answer is “God”!*
- Camus concludes:
“Howard you have made it very clear to me that we are not the only ones in this world. There is something that is “invisible”! And that there is “help” for all of us!

Friends:

These are “not” the words of a man who is making a profession of faith in “Jesus Christ” but they are significant!

- “Camus” was willing to “admit” that he had found only spiritual quicksand in the landscape of “meaningless” – and to “consider” that there was a God who “might” satisfy his thirst for meaning after all!
- “However” another “philosopher” lived centuries earlier!
- “Blaise Pascal” (1623-1662) was without equal, a brilliant French thinker, scientist, mathematician and inventor. At 15 he was writing books; as a teenager he invented history’s first digital calculating machine! But as a young man he had trouble with the spiritual equations of life and soon became “disillusioned” with the pleasures of his fashionable society!
- Everything seemed “boring” to him!
- “Nothing” was “fresh” or “fulfilling”!
- One night Pascal picked up a Bible and turned to John 17! As he began reading “Verse 3” blazed out like a spark and seemed to set the “room on fire”.
“And this is “eternal life”: that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent!”
- Pascal’s soul instantly took wing, and he was in the “permanent embrace” of Jesus Christ!
- He immediately took pen and parchment, he began quickly writing down his thoughts:-
*“In the year of Grace, 1654, On Monday 23rd November,
FIRE
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars.
Certitude, Certitude, Feeling, Joy, Peace
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.
Jesus Christ
Let me never be separated from Him.”*
- “Pascal” spent the rest of his short life proclaiming the greatness of God.

- It was the same Pascal who echoed the words of Ecclesiastes:
“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing but by God alone made known through Jesus Christ!”

Friends:

Is your “soul” still “empty” or have you been “embraced” by Jesus Christ!

- “Meaningless, Meaningless”! says the Teacher!
Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”
- God created a “void” in your heart that is only His to fill! When life becomes meaningless, boring and hard it’s because we’ve been filling it with anything but Him!

Friends:

This “new year”:

Look BACK and thank God

Look FORWARD and trust God

Look AROUND and serve God

Look WITHIN and seek God’s forgiveness

True meaning is only found in the LORD JESUS!

Let’s Pray!!