

THE VANITY OF WORLDLY PURSUITS

BIBLE TEXT : Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 2:1-26.

LESSON 376 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

- ¹ The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- ² Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.
- ³ What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
- ⁴ *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.
- ⁵ The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.
- 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.
- 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.
- ⁸ All things *are* full of labour; man cannot utter *it*: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
- ⁹ The thing that hath been, it *is* *that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun.
- ¹⁰ Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.
- ¹¹ *There is* no remembrance of former *things*; neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after.
- ¹² I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Solomon's Greatness

King Solomon no doubt had all the experiences that come to man. He had everything that people think should make them happy.

He had **power**. He was king of Israel at a time when they enjoyed the greatest prosperity in their history; and he was an absolute monarch who had the power of life and death over his subjects.

Solomon had **wisdom**. He was called by God the wisest man in all the world. When he became king, he felt himself as but a child, and felt he could not rule so great a people. But he asked God for wisdom, and God gave it to him. His fame was known in all the nations round about, "and there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom" (I Kings 4:34). He wrote many proverbs and songs, "and he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes" (I Kings 4:33).

Solomon had **riches**. He was one of the richest men who ever lived. Silver was in the streets as rocks. He had "forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen" (I Kings 4:26). He built beautiful palaces and gardens. In fact, he said that anything he wanted he took for himself. He had everything he could wish for, but he was not happy.

Disappointment

Solomon backslid and tried to find satisfaction in the pleasures of the world. Again he denied himself nothing; but when he pillowed his head at night, he was like any other sinner who tries to run from God. He was condemned. Life had no meaning. He said, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." He came to the conclusion that the whole duty of man is to fear God and to keep His commandments.

The more Solomon learned about the world, the more trouble he saw among the people. He saw the misery among the downtrodden. Then, too, he may have been like many knowledge-hungry people today. The more they learn, the more they find they do not know. They are always striving for the pinnacle just ahead, and never attaining to it.

The true wisdom, which is from above "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). That is the kind of wisdom that makes people happy, and for which God wants them to seek.

No Peace in Wealth

Let us consider riches. If money made people happy there would not be so many millionaires committing suicide. Someone remarked that no rich man could enjoy a good book more than he, nor see a collection of beautiful paintings with better vision than he. "Lindbergh cannot soar over a city and respond to a single thrill that is denied me; the autumn woods are there for me and for you as they were for John Burroughs (the naturalist);

¹³ And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

¹⁵ *That which is* crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

¹⁶ I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

¹⁷ And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

¹⁸ For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

¹ I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity.

² I said of laughter, *It is* mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

³ I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

⁴ I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

⁵ I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits:

⁶ I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

Luther Burbank never enjoyed his plant wizardry a whit more than I enjoy purchasing a shrub and sticking it down into the earth and trampling it with my foot and then sitting back and watching it grow." The poorest of us can enjoy these things as much as one who has money; and the Christian can enjoy them so much more when he considers God in all that nature gives us.

Laws of the Universe

The things that God has made are not affected by the troubles of man. The sun rises and sets every day as it has since the creation, and is never affected by war, famine, or the generations of men who have lived and died since the beginning of time. The rivers run into the ocean and the water is absorbed into the clouds, only to fall again in rain and flow back to the seas. The Bible tells us that seedtime and harvest shall continue so long as the sun, moon, and stars endure.

A man is born and a few years later he dies. His life's activities may affect other men for a generation or two, but nothing he can do affects God's creation. Perhaps he builds great buildings, or dams, or canals — the biggest things that man can make — but we find that an atom bomb can in an instant totally destroy all the works of man's hands. Even if they are not destroyed by force, time and the elements eventually wear away the greatest achievements of man.

Often people work hard to make a name for themselves. They want to be remembered. We read in the Bible of people who built the Tower of Babel to make their fame endure. They said: "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). We remember the folly of that building but who knows anything about the people who built it? They are forgotten on the face of the earth.

Some people like to wander through old cemeteries, reading inscriptions on the tombstones. Sometimes they find interesting little comments about the one who lies buried there. But no one remembers who he was. He lived and died and other generations followed with new interests and customs. So soon is man forgotten.

So far as man's physical being is concerned, the just and the unjust are all the same. They all live and die, and are forgotten. They know nothing in the grave.

Our Names in God's Book

If our life on this earth is so brief, what manner of men ought we to be in order to attain to the thing that is important — eternal life! We can obtain immortal fame by having our name written in the Lamb's Book of Life. If God remembers us, it does not matter if we are forgotten here. Our life here is very brief, but we shall live hereafter forever and ever.

Because of wars and persecution, many people do not live out their days. They die young. The true Christian has something to die for. If he must leave this world in a hurry, he knows he will but enter into a Better Land. He has the hope of soon seeing Jesus. Jesus will crown His martyrs with a crown of life. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (II Timothy 2:12).

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7).

When we think about the glory that Jesus has prepared for those who love Him, the things of this world lose their importance. Let others have their wealth, their power, their earthly wisdom. We feel as Abraham felt. He had no continuing city here, but looked for a city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). May we strive to

⁷ I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

⁸ I gathered *me* also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat *me* men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

⁹ So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

¹⁰ And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

¹² And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done.

¹³ Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

¹⁴ The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

¹⁵ Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity.

¹⁶ For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in the days to come shall all be

enter into that city!

QUESTIONS

1. How much power did King Solomon have?
2. How much wealth did he have?
3. Tell a little of Solomon's wisdom.
4. Did the things Solomon had make him happy?
5. How long will seedtime and harvest continue?
6. What happens to the things man makes?
7. How can we be sure of being remembered?
8. Who will "inherit all things"?

forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man*? as the fool.

¹⁷ Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

¹⁸ Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

¹⁹ And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity.

²⁰ Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

²¹ For there is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil.

²² For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

²³ For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

²⁴ *There is* nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God.

²⁵ For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I?

²⁶ For *God* giveth to a man that *is* good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to *him that is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

