



Introduction:

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See this is new’? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after” (**Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**, ESV). Basically, the Preacher proclaims, life stinks, then you die. And death ruins everything. It makes all things vain. It makes our lives vain. Is there anything that can be done about this? Absolutely. In fact, there is something that has been done about it. But first, let’s examine the vanity before we see the victory.

Discussion:

I. Vain attempts at victory.

- A. The Preacher of **Ecclesiastes** made several attempts to break free from the vanity of life. He hoped to achieve victory by his own pursuits. Notice what he found. He found it all vanity (**Ecclesiastes 1:12-14**).
 - 1. The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge: Vain (**Ecclesiastes 1:17-18**).
 - 2. The pursuit of pleasure: Vain (**Ecclesiastes 2:1-2**).
 - 3. The pursuit of possessions: Vain (**Ecclesiastes 2:4-11**).
 - 4. The pursuit of work: Vain (**Ecclesiastes 2:18-19**).
- B. When he examined all his pursuits, the Preacher discovered that there was no victory in any of it. It was all vain. The outcome for the Preacher was despair (**Ecclesiastes 2:20-23**). Do we honestly think if we try to find the victory in any of these same approaches, we will fare any better?

II. The great vanitizer (yes, I just made up that word).

- A. Why are all these pursuits vain for everyone? One reason. At the end of each one is death. Death is the great equalizer. Death is the great vanitizer.
 - 1. The wise and the fool both die, making the pursuit of wisdom vain (**Ecclesiastes 2:15-16**).
 - 2. Man and beast both die, making civil living vain (**Ecclesiastes 3:18-20**).
 - 3. We all die and can carry nothing in our hands at death, making all our possessions vain (**Ecclesiastes 5:15-16**).
 - 4. The righteous and the wicked both die, making righteousness vain (**Ecclesiastes 9:1-3**). [I know this one is shocking, but don’t tune out yet.]
 - 5. Death comes at surprising times on the strong, the wise, the rich, the intelligent, making all earthly advantages vain (**Ecclesiastes 9:11-12**).
- B. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’...before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity” (**Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-8**). Death is coming. It is coming for everyone. It is coming when you don’t expect it. And when it comes it makes everything you’ve ever done useless and vain. Death is the great vanitizer.

III. From vanity to victory!

- A. Life is pretty drab when we think of it like this. Why do anything? Why not just make a grab for any amount of pleasure you can have at any given moment and try to make the best of it? I’ll tell you why. There is an escape from vanity. There is an escape to victory. And while the Preacher of **Ecclesiastes** gives us a hint, it took almost a thousand years before the real answer came on the scene. And in **I Corinthians 15** Paul explains the journey from vanity to victory.

- B. But first we must remember what is the great vanitizer? Death. We should not then be surprised to discover that the path to victory is resurrection from the dead. **I Corinthians 15:50-58** drives the point home. According to **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, at death, the spirit returns to God who gave it. In that passage, that is not so much a pointer to resurrection as it is a pointer to God's supremacy over our spirits. Once our spirits return to Him, He can do what He wants to with them. And what will He do? He will resurrect them. And that, my brethren, is the game changer.
- C. In fact, notice how Paul concludes his point in **I Corinthians 15:58**. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Outside of the Lord it is completely vain. Why? Because if we are outside of the Lord we will die, and because of sin we will be judged (cf. **I Corinthians 15:57**; resurrected to condemnation—**John 5:28-29**). But in the Lord, we will be resurrected to life. Through Jesus Christ all that would otherwise have been vain is redeemed for His glory and our victory.

IV. Don't be vain.

- A. Interestingly, Paul is very much concerned with vanity in **I Corinthians 15**. In fact, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Paul was himself thinking of all of **Ecclesiastes** as he penned this chapter.
- B. While he plays on vanity as part of his argument in favor of Jesus' resurrection pointing out that our preaching and our faith is in vain if Jesus hasn't really been raised from the dead (**I Corinthians 15:14**), there are two other verses that we need to grasp otherwise all of our lives will be in vain when we face the resurrection just as assuredly as if there wasn't one.
- C. In **I Corinthians 15:1-2**, Paul tells us "to hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain" (ESV). He goes on to explain the word he preached to the Corinthians in **I Corinthians 15:3-9**, that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was then resurrected as testified by numerous witnesses including Paul himself. We must hang on to that. It is the bedrock of our faith. Most of the rest of the chapter is about that very point. If we deny the historical veracity of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, we might as well abandon everything the Bible teaches and stands for. In fact, in our modern day, the post-modernists would have us believe all the miracles of the Bible including the resurrection are ancient myths. Some of them, however, try to claim that there is still a valid place for Christianity in our world. They try to claim there is a good place for the teaching of the great man, Jesus, to help us find ourselves and dig deep in our inner being to find how we too can be our true selves like He was. That is simply pop-culture hogwash. It just isn't true. Either Jesus is who the Bible claims, the Son of God, and was miraculously resurrected from death making Him the Lord and Christ (cf. **Acts 2:36**) whom we should follow in every way possible, or He wasn't resurrected and He was just a man like you and me, in which case He was a vicious and awful liar.
- D. Then in **I Corinthians 15:10**, Paul is concerned about God's grace being in vain. We have studied a great deal about God's grace. Sadly, some have the notion that because of God's grace, they can sit on their backsides and simply coast along on easy street down the path of least resistance and God will just carry them into eternity with Him. But that wasn't Paul's approach. Paul said God's grace wasn't in vain in him because he worked hard. Through Jesus Christ, God's grace has taken us from vanity to victory. But we can slide right back into vanity if we view the victory in Christ as license and permission to procrastinate our spiritual growth, living in apathy, and pursuing sin. The grace of God was given to us so we would work (cf. **Ephesians 2:8-10**). Do not let that grace be given to you in vain. Rather, get to work.
- E. And so, Paul's conclusion is that we must not believe in vain, but instead hold fast to the word that was preached to us. Further, we must not let God's grace be in vain, but instead get to work, toiling as hard as we can. After all, "my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (**I Corinthians 15:58**, ESV).

Conclusion:

So which will you pursue? Outside of Jesus Christ, everything you pursue, everything you attain, everything you accomplish will be in vain. You will die. You will leave it to others. They will eventually waste it. And you will be forgotten. However, in Jesus Christ, you will be rescued from the vanity that is life in this world and will be resurrected to a victory that means your labor in this world will actually matter. Which will you choose?