

Ecclesiastes 1:2-11
November 3, 2021

I. Introduction (1:1)

II. Human Effort (1:2-6:9)

A. All Is Vapor (1:2-11)

As we begin, we recall what we looked at last week with three aspects to the word *vanity*. The life we have is brief, it's ineffectual on any large scale, and, yes, it can stink! So when Solomon begins right off the top with a five-fold repetition of this word, it really sets the tone!

Not only that, but we note that the Hebrew word for *all* occurs 91x in this book. Again, repetition should immediately catch our eyes. The author is seeing these issues so comprehensively, not allowing any aspect of life to be exempt from these statements.

The question he asks in v. 3 not only serves to explain his exclamation of v. 2, but also serves to frame the discussion for the first half of the book: What *profit* is there from all of our work (cf. 2:22; 3:9; 5:11, 16; 6:8, 11)? What is the purpose of life? This word *profit* is translated as *gain* or *advantage* in other versions. Essentially, at the end of it all, what do we have to show for our lives *under the sun* (occurs 29x in Ecclesiastes, and only Ecclesiastes)?

Throughout the book, Solomon is going to keep going back to three main areas that are our *labor*, although we won't come across them today. They are: pleasure, wisdom, and work, and we'll see them come out in full force next week. We should expect Solomon to categorize them this way after his own pursuits of these aims throughout his life and kingship. He finds that all three are *vanity*.

In vv. 4-7, he gives three examples from the physical world that attest to the fact that, even though there is much activity, there's no gain. *The sun... returns to its place. The wind returns in its cycles. All the streams... flow again.* What a monotonous, pointless endeavor!

Don't we often view life like this? It's Monday... again. I'm doing the household chores... again. I'm performing the same task at work... again. It can feel like we're stuck in an endless cycle, so it should be easy for us to identify with Solomon's lament that we're on this "autopilot" until we die!

In v. 8, there's no satisfaction in life, *all things are wearisome*. We're tired of talking, we've become jaded in what we see and hear. What helps us break through this mindset?

And what about the universal nature of our condition (vv. 9-11)? *There is nothing new under the sun!* The things we face today, the way we feel today, they aren't unique to our time. Because of what we've experienced in our lifetimes, we feel like things are worse now than ever before, but they're not, and we should take comfort in that. If the Lord has been through this time and time again, then He will continue to be faithful even now!

Perhaps even more sobering is that *there is no remembrance of former things* (v. 11). What legacy do we seek to leave? What do we want to pass down... and why? How many of us know much about even our great-grandparents, let alone those that came before them? Think of all the people who strive to be remembered for all time. What good does that serve?

The eighteenth-century theologian Nikolaus von Zinzendorf quite famously said: "Preach the Gospel, die, and be forgotten." Although a little startling at first, perhaps this quote is more in-line with a biblical worldview than we'd like to realize!