

Vanity of Vanities

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[0 : 00] There's no turn to that portion of the Word of God that we have read, the book of Ecclesiastes. And again we shall refer to chapter 1 and other references in this book as well.

I'm not going to take a text as such, but what I would like to do tonight is refer to some references and statements in this book which might throw light on the philosophy of life.

So this book has been described by some as a philosophy of life, and I do believe that it will help us understand our life, the purpose of our creation, that we'll hear from and so forth.

There are many, many complex questions that people ask, and I'm sure we should all ask these questions as long as we go to the world of God for the answers.

But have we not asked ourselves, and so many people before us have asked, what are we here for? What's the meaning of life?

[1 : 11] Why did we ever come into this world? Why are all these millions of people in this world? What is the aim of it all? Why does it all go to the end?

Why do so many different people have different opinions? Why are there so many different philosophies? Why are there so many different religions? And the questions go on and on.

And my word, the answers are not easy to come by. I'm sure that we all see life from a different plane. Some people see life as a great opportunity.

Some people see life as an opportunity to serve themselves and serve their families. They want their families to get their own role. They want themselves also to have all the security that they can lay hands on.

And so do some. Others have political aspirations. And they want power. And they want power. There are so many people today who want to be leaders in our midst.

[2 : 20] Others, they want to be strong in a military sense. And they, all these people, they view life as if it were from a different plane.

But I love this again, they want great possessions. And they want a lot of virtues. They want to possess so many things as they can lay hands on in the world.

But in all these things do we get satisfaction. By the preacher, the son of David, Solomon, he viewed life as if from an underlaby that we do not often see people in life from.

And then we see that sometimes he touches that note we call despair. Despair. Who wants to spare? We all want to have something to live for.

We do not want to spare. We want a meaning in life. And if there is no meaning in life, then we are in trouble. When we read this chapter that I read tonight, and when we read the other parts of this book, then we see exactly where this man is leading us.

[3 : 34] He's giving us a view, or he's giving us a vision into life that we do not often perceive, that we do not often get. And he says that all is vanity.

If we read again what he says before us here in Vers 2, vanity of vanity, says the preacher. All is vanity. And then he says, What, Prophet, as a man of all this labor, could you take it under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes. The earth abides forever. So he sees everything, as if it were, in cycles, repeating itself, until he feels that there is no purpose.

At least that's how it seems in the surface. In Vers 5 he says, The sun rises, and the sun goes down. The same thing day after day.

The wind goes to the south, and then it goes right round to the north. Everything cycles and circles. And he says, Well, what is all this about? The rubbish keeps flowing to the sea.

[4 : 44] And then they evaporate with the heat, and the flowing clouds in heaven. And then they fall down once again, as well, and they flow into the sea again.

All repetition and repetition. And he says, What's the meaning of it all? All things have sin of labor. None cannot get it.

The eye is not satisfied with sin. The eye is filled with hearing. And so on. And we also see that in this book, he raises other questions.

Maybe we can label them as being awkward questions. He says, Why do so many people suffer? What is all the suffering in the world? Why is it that righteous people so often they have troubles and terrorists and people commit great acts of sin and iniquity, they seem to get all off with it, and everything seems to go well with them.

And he gets so many questions to ask. And in the end, he says these words, Vanity of Vanity, always Vanity. And then we have to ask ourselves, did we see a position to come to this sort of judgment?

[5 : 59] Why did we seek him to this sort of judgment? Does he know what it is to have great possessions? Does he know what it is to have all that his heart decides for, without all that his heart would want?

Does he know what it is to have great knowledge, to have great wisdom? And then we see that this man, maybe, was the wisest person that ever came into this world, and probably also the richest man that ever came into this world.

If you look at verse 2, of chapter 2 and verse 4, see what he says, I made me great works, I built me houses, I planted me vineyards, I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees and then, of all kinds of fruit.

I made me poles of water, to water, to the wood, to the woods, to the forest, to the trees. I got me servants and maidens, and I had servants born in my house.

Also I had great possession of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me silver and gold under the peculiar churches of kings and of the provinces.

[7 : 17] I got me men singers and women singers and so on. So I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem. He was greater than anybody who ever was before him in Jerusalem.

Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever my eyes desired, I kept not from them. I would hold not my heart for many joy.

For my heart rejoiced in all my labour. And this was my portion of all my labour. And then verse 11, and this is what I want just to draw your attention to at this point.

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

Now we see that this man was touched by what we can call the vanity factor.

[8 : 22] The vanity factor. Now this vanity factor is something very real. It doesn't seem to afflict civilisation, it doesn't seem to afflict people where there's a lot of primitive tribes, where civilisation hasn't advanced.

People who are primitive don't seem to be afflicted with this vanity factor that we have here. It is amongst people and amongst civilisations that have made great progress in this world.

And when we look at the Greek nation before the Lord came into this world, we see that they were afflicted with this vanity factor.

And even today, we can take this phenomenon that I'm speaking about here, we can take it into our own setting today, then we see that it is still with us and it is a big problem.

Now I had a paper with statistics which I mislaid when I was on the way over from Australia and that paper made me rather depressed because I saw in that paper that many university students, especially in Japan, in America, and in Britain and other parts of the world, they were afflicted by this vanity factor and a lot of students, they turned to drugs, they turned to drink, they turned to any escape way that they could think of and even the ultimate escape the way they thought about it in a way.

[10 : 10] So many of them took their own lives and that doesn't just fall into hundreds, but it falls into hundreds of thousands of students who are very intelligent people who take their own lives throughout the world.

People who study the sciences, people who study philosophy, and there are so many of them who were brought round and those who were fortunate enough not to pass from time into eternity when they were asked, why did you do it?

They almost all have the same answer, a kind of a stereotype answer. What is the purpose in life? What is the point in living?

What is life all about? And this is the way they responded. This was the answer. What is the purpose in life? And we also, we have to face this very question tonight.

And we always have to be careful, not as if it were, to put our head under the sand and maybe to look in some other direction. We have to look at life.

[11:24] The people of God have to look at life. We should all look at life. We shouldn't be cowards. We know there are many problems. We know there are many things that we cannot understand. And there are, as if it were, hundreds of problems being brought into being every day by our complex society and by the way our society works.

And we cannot handle these things. We know that it's too difficult for us to handle. Therefore, what I would like to do tonight for a short period of time is to look at society, the whole spectrum of society and the three groups and see which way these groups handle this problem of the vanity factor.

And again, I must say, we should ask questions. We should face up to it. We should not, by any means, turn about to it because it's too much of a problem in our way.

And I would like to think of society in the three groups. We know that, you know, from a Christian point of view, there are only two groups in society.

There are the believers and the non-believers and the non-believers. There are only the saved and those who are not saved. But I would like to, tonight, to think of atheists, to think of non-believers and to think of believers.

[12:58] So think of these groups, three. Atheists, non-believers, non-believers. Now, when I refer to atheists, that is self-explanatory.

But then, when I refer to non-believers, I mean those who have false religions. And you might think that this is very arrogant of me to say this. Those who have false religions and false philosophies, but nevertheless, they are not believers in the true sense of the word, in the living God and in the word of God.

And we are so good believers. These are those who know the truth. And many, my word only, relatively speaking, only a few people know the truth.

I know that from the words of the Lord Jesus. In his day, there were few. And it is the same if I look at the history of the church. very few people know the truth.

And it is the same in our day if we look around us. And if we look at statistics, then we see that very few people know the truth. And again, I might mention this and I think that is arrogant of me to say.

[14:18] But let us see what the word of God says. First of all, let us look at these atheists. the people who do not believe in God at all, how do they look at this life?

How do they approach this complex life of ours? And I'm sure I'm right when I say we are, whoever we are, we must have a way of escape. And the atheists, they also must have a way of escape. You see, quite common amongst the atheists, those who don't believe in God, they adopt some sort of philosophy like Epicurean philosophy. You know, that which we have here in this book, when people say, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

Let us eat and drink, it doesn't matter, let us just go on with it. Let us have a good time as long as we can have a good time. Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

The same people who met Paul in chapter 15 of the first epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul had an encounter with these people and he speaks about them and when he speaks about that doctrine of the resurrection, there are those who say, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[15:38] These are the Epicureans, the Epicurean philosophy and therefore they do not care, they go on, they are not responsible, they are not responsible people, they don't want to fess up to reality, they are living in a world which is separated from reality as far as they are concerned.

Now some people take that way and we know the difficulties and the problems they end up with and we know how great these problems can be but there are others amongst this category of the atheists and they invent for themselves a philosophy or maybe a body of teaching or you can call it if you like almost a religion.

And these people they become slaves to their philosophy, they become slaves to their religion be it communism or whatever.

Maybe it's Marxism, humanism, so manyisms but not God. No, no, not God. They wouldn't under any circumstances under any circumstances so they tell us they wouldn't believe in God.

But the strange thing about these people is this that they make their own God and their philosophy becomes their God. once they become enslaved to their philosophy they must not break it.

[17:13] They worship their philosophy. Look at communism today throughout the world. Look at communism in the Eastern Bloc. Try and break it. Those people who are unfortunate enough to be under the communist regime whatever it may be how they know that it is their God and you know human nature must have a God it is ingrained in human nature it is stamped on the very essence of your being and you can't help it you must get something to worship and that these people they worship their philosophy they worship their communism or their humanism or whatever and they become slaves to it and you must not go against it and we see that these people do face life and the reality of life with a lie well you can face life with a lie if you want to and you can't you can't to the truth to one side if you want to but anybody who takes the care to analyze this sort of philosophy like communism or humanism or Marxism or whatever as you analyze it and if you are honest in your mind when you look at it then you will see that there is something about it that doesn't ring through there is something about it that is deceitful there is something about it that leads to error because it is one big error it might sound very possible it might have a lot of attractions but when you come to work it out there is a lot of suffering there is very little fairness it is for that reason you see people building up a big wall to keep those who are under their government to keep them in they speak of peace and they tell us they have so much peace but we would rather liberty than peace the people of God not so long ago they could have had peace if they had given in to the devilish yoke of the atheists in times going by they could have had peace but they preferred their liberty and for that reason they went to death we hear so much about peace today that there is nothing like liberty and there is no liberty like the liberty that the word of God gives us there is no liberty like the liberty that we get from heaven and that is the true liberty but maybe if I have time I'll say a few words about that in a moment but let us just move on from these people who are in this category the atheists and see how these people if they are left on their own will perish they will perish but there I wonder at this stage to go to the next category and that is the category of the non-believers how do they face up to life now in this group you can have people of many religions maybe Buddhists maybe Hindus maybe Muslims maybe Jews maybe normal Christians there is no end to it sects of different kinds and a lot of these people they believe in God or they believe in a God and these people very often they think of some utopia some who are there in the future there is everything is going to be alright in the end and they get solace from this they get satisfaction from this they follow their religions and they know what I have we've got to be careful when we speak about these people or when we speak about atheists or whatever especially people who preach about them or who lecture about them we've got to be very careful indeed for this reason every one of us in here if we had been born if we had been born under such a philosophy we would have been the same if I had been born a Hindu I would have been a Hindu if I had been born a Muslim I would have been a Muslim if I'm born a Christian I'm a normal Christian so therefore we must be careful not to stand on a platform of self-righteousness and condemn these people we must not from a stance of pride look down upon anybody else because nobody would have been as bad as we are as we would have been if God would have left us nobody would have been as bad as we would have been every one of us we should call ourselves the chief of sinners this is what Paul called himself the chief of sinners he saw himself worse than others than anybody else well if we know anything of the holiness of God then we know something of the deceitfulness of our own heart but that is something quite different what I'm saying is this that we would have been whatever we would have been born into and that is a matter of fact that is a statement of fact so therefore if I had been born Jewish I would have been practicing Judaism today unless one thing unless God would have intervened and unless God in his mercy would have shown me by his grace the truth of the gospel but these people who are in this category non-believers they have a heaven there waiting for them somewhere they have some sort of utopia they have some sort of a place maybe some sort of future and it varies with the religion of these people and so in this way they are able to face up to this vanity factor and they see everything as telling you they are right in the end but then we have another group the believers now these are quite different from the other two the believers they know the truth they have seen by the spirit of God a light or whatever you care to call it they have seen the face of the son of God in the gospel and through the faith which is in

Christ Jesus they know the way to heaven they know the truth and they do not in any way at least they should not turn their back they shouldn't put their head into the sand they know that there is a lot of suffering in the world and it bothers them they know that there are many problems in this world that they do not understand they are concerned about the righteous suffering in the world they are concerned about the number of people who perish in the world they are concerned about all the problems that seem to be accumulating in the world day by day and my word they are concerned about it but they are they are different from the other two groups especially in this respect they go to God like the psalmist in Psalm 73 when he looked around him and when he saw the injustice that was happening all over round about him and he couldn't understand it and he seemed to fall down into the depth of despair and he couldn't get over it and he wanted to share it with somebody and he couldn't because his heart was troubling him and in the end the psalmist understood and you know what he understood he understood when he went into the sanctuary when he went into the house of God then I understood he said

[25 : 42] I understood the end and the people of God they understand today they understand life they understand that life is short and we all know that life is short and we understand or we should understand that everything in this world is only for a moment that this life as it stands before them is something that could be taken away from them in one second in one moment and they know that they could be brought into the presence of God in the twinkling of an eye but then their view of life is coloured by something else whereas these people who are bothered so much by the humanity factor they see things so brief as we have here in this book that is said before us or it appears to be in this book that is said before us here everything is so brief everything is temporary everything passes away but the people of God those whom

God those whom he has touched by the power of the spirit they know that life goes on and it doesn't end at death it goes on and on and they know that there is a quality in life in the future something that is worth living for and that quality will be seen when they shall be presented at that judgment seat of Christ when they shall hear that solemn pronouncement come ye blessed of my father and inherit the kingdom God was prepared for them before the foundation of the world first is their golden heretics that is why they can face up to life so God is in control so know that God has come into this world and God has made provision for them and because of his grace and his mercy has saved them out of this world they are in the world but they are not of the world and that makes all the difference to be in the world is one thing to be of the world is something else and the people who are who are may be oppressed by this vanity factor and who do not have this

God who do not have this salvation no wonder they are in this space and no wonder they see everything as dark no wonder they see everything so short so bleeds and no purpose in love because God has not revealed to them and something else too the God of this world has blinded them as well the God of this world has blinded them now let me make something very clear maybe one or two things at this stage we do not believe that this book speaks about despair when we go right into it when we go to the depths of this book this book tells us about salvation and about grace and it does tell us about the purpose of living if we look at chapter 7 verse 15 he reads these words all things have I seen in the days of my vanity there is a just man that perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness and this version this seems to disturb him but then the next chapter at verse 12 he gives us an answer to that question for a sinner do evil a hundred times and his case be prolonged yet surely

I know that it shall be well with them that fear God it shall be well with them that fear God which fear before him so he is telling us here that it shall be good for those who feel God it shall be well for those who feel God all this vanity at all it is on the surface the way man sees it it is vanity and I would also like to make the point that so that the people of God are not immune to this vanity factor of course the people of God can go down and down in the depths of despair but I do not believe they will fall into despair they can be like John Williams Pilgrims told us they can be locked in the castle of giant despair but they shall never ever lose the key of promise although they are locked in the castle of giant despair they shall never ever lose the key of promise and that is the most difference between the people of

God and those who do not know God at all and that makes all the difference in this world for those who have all these problems in this world so have a promise for God the salvation of God has been promised them and although the evil one will come and although Satan will do all in his power to mislead them and to make them believe that they will lose this nevertheless they cannot lose it and

they know that he who has taken them into his arms he will not let them go the father who has given them to me is there to them all he will go to them all and no man can cut them out of my father's hands and for that reason they know that faith is of God it doesn't depend on us it is of God and now can I just for a moment turn to the younger people here tonight and I say to you there are many problems in this life there are many things that he did not expect in this life and they are far more complex than he ever thought about and these things as they weigh down in your mind and as they face reality can only be tackled

[32 : 44] I believe by the word of God under the direction of the word of God and we have to ask ourselves what is truth and this is what all philosophers soon want to find out what is truth if we would know that then we would have the key to this life and all these problems could be solved if we could know what truth is what is truth and we remember the words of the redeemer I am the way the truth and the life now going back to these truths again many people have said to me that it is arrogant of us to say that we are right and they are wrong because there's hundreds of millions of them there's hundreds of millions of Hindus there's hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world there's millions of Jews and millions of rubbish as well and surely you don't say that you're right and we're young well we have to go to the scriptures of truth but you might say to me that they have their own Bible the Muslims they have the Quran and how do you know that the

Quran isn't right how do you know that the Jews aren't right when they practice their own religion or even for that matter how do you know that the Marxists aren't right how do you know that well it is something that has to be laid at the very throne of heaven and if God doesn't enlighten us it's a very solemn thing if God doesn't enlighten us we shall be forever in darkness and when we read this word this book the word of God if God doesn't give us understanding we shall be forever under an illusion we shall be deceived and we shall forever head in the wrong direction be it drugs or some other way or maybe a false religion whatever it is but not the truth and they shall be ever searching but never coming to our knowledge of the truth unless that spirit of God will touch them and what I would suggest to you young people tonight is this is to come to the word of God and to read the word of God and pray that God will enlighten you as you read his word because there is no other push in the world so powerful as the word of God to convince you of the truth you can read all the philosophies in the world but you can never come to truth there is only one body of teaching that we call the holy scriptures which contain the truth and again

I must emphasize read the word and see for yourselves what this word declares and then you see something which is completely different from anything the Muslims have or anything the Buddhists or the Hindus have you see something different when you read about God because this is the only these are the only scriptures that tell us about the holiness of God you read about you read about the Quran in the Quran and you see how little stress is laid on this attribute of holiness you see how little stress is laid upon the justice of God in the manner that you have it here and also you see nothing about the great salvation that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ and when you read about the logical sequence that happens right from the book of Genesis to Revelation you see that there is something behind it greater than man greater than angel greater than any other being and this word of God tells us that God came into this world that God was revealed in the flesh and that God in the passion of his son went to the cross and that the son of God laid down his life and sacrificed so that his people would be saved so that every one of them would be saved every one of them will come to acknowledge the truth and we have to preach and declare this word to you tonight come to the truth come to the word of God and as you see the saviour the son of God manifested and revealed in his world then you shall forever and ever turn towards God and you will not turn your back to God after that you will not you might have an experience of spiritual detention I'm not saying that but never ever will you turn again your back to your God and then when we read about the people of God and when we read about the word of God which enlightened them then we see how this world kept them and it is the only rule to direct them how they may glorify and enjoy him you know it was said the story is told about

David Hume the great philosopher and how David Hume came into contact with a Christian person and they had a discussion and that discussion went down to literature and to books and to very weighty statements and very profound statements and David Hume and some people feel that he was one of the greatest philosophers who ever lived although he was an atheist David Hume pointed to all these philosophical writings and how profound they were but the Christian person said to him I know of a statement in a book which is more profound than anything you have declared to

me here and he directed his attention to the book of the Revelation chapter 20 at verse 11 and he read in these words and I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it from his face there and the heaven fled away and there was found no place for them and I saw the dead small and great stand before

[40 : 43] God and the books were opened and another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works and the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them and they were judged every man according to their works and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire this is the second death and he was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire and that is truth that is what's going to happen and you may say but how can it be how can the dead rise that according to that statement there is something almost impossible going to happen the dead are going to be raised well how can the dead rise those who are in their graves thousands of years those who have been incinerated those who have been eaten by animals how can they rise well we have to ask ourselves the question today in this very advanced society in which we live today with all the advancements in science and so forth and we say what ultimately will human intelligence do where will human intelligence stop if the world is spared maybe for a few hundred years what will human intelligence do then because it's progressing now at a terrible rate and then

I ask myself the question but what if I go to another category of beings what if I go to another category of beings who are much more intelligent than human beings what if think of angels the angels in heaven these beings who were created in a higher form than man what about them what could they do if man is so advanced today with all his technology what would angels do could an angel could the highest angel in heaven raise the dead could the highest angel in heaven raise the dead but then I go far beyond that and I must go to another as if it were category altogether and the human beings and the angels they're all created beings and no matter how intelligent they are and no matter what great advances they make they are all created beings but then

I take a big leap as it were to a being who was never created a being who was always in existence who could always say I am he could say to Adam I am he could say to whom I am he could say to the first angel who was created I am the great I am who created everything by the word of his power and when we think of his power when we think of the greatness of his being when these problems like the reason of the dead and these things which seem so impossible that this word that I was referring to here tonight speaks about when we think of this being the raising of the dead as we have it in the book of the revelation there's no problem what seems to be a problem for us it's no problem to

God but let me conclude on this note I was speaking about the great miracle that must happen before the dead will arise but there is a great miracle and that is those who are spiritually dead they also must be raised from the dead and there is no powerless world that can make those who are dead in trespasses and sin alive there is no angel in heaven the greatest angel in heaven cannot make you pass from death to life spiritually the greatest angel in heaven cannot do it there is only one agent that can do it and that is the spirit of the most high God and the spirit of the most high God he will touch his own people and he will make them learn today is coming the

Lord said that all those who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of God and they shall live and it is the same with those who are dead in Christmas and sin they must hear the voice of the Son of God and they shall live they go to their

[47 : 27] God there is no to whom other shall we go wasn't that what Peter said so long ago who shall we go to but to thee and this is the experience of the people of God it was that was their experience from the beginning and it will be their experience right to the end when I see these things who shall I go to when all these complex things coming to me do I turn to drugs maybe I do turn to drugs do I turn to alcohol do I turn to some other way an easy way out in the world do I contemplate ending it all the people of God know what it is to go to that valley of darkness the God who is able and not only able but he will do it he will present every one of them faultless before his throne we were reading about the great white throne here tonight he will present them all not one of them will be lost not one and if you come to a noise of the truth and this life then will become it will if

I can put it like this it will be something different for for you after you come to our knowledge of the truth you will see it in a different light you will see it you will see it from a different plane you will see it from a different angle and once you are on the way to heaven you will not be lost and you will not

regret that you ever took the first step on the way to heaven because there is something that pulls you along that Christian of old in the pilgrim's progress he had many difficulties and he had many problems but he couldn't stop Apollyon met him in the valley of the shadow but he couldn't stop he saw lions in the way but he couldn't stop he saw terrible difficulties leaning up ahead of him a terrible river came into view and it frightened him very much but he couldn't stop and he crossed the river and John

Bunyan says that he saw him going into the celestial city and he wished that he could have gone in with him and that is reality that is truth maybe you say I cannot accept that but if the spirit of God will touch your heart you cannot resist him and may it so happen let us pray Lord our God have mercy upon us because of thy grace and because of thy love help us we pray thee to put all things into thy hand and to commit our souls to thee we ask these things in Jesus name Amen Amen