

Vanity, Vanity

by Chuck Smith

The sermon highlights the problem of vanity and the emptiness of life under the sun, but offers a solution in finding fulfillment in a spiritual relationship with God.

Duration: 37:47

Scripture: Psalm 107:9, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Matthew 11:28, Mark 5:34, John 7:38, John 17:3, Romans 8:20

Topics: "Vanity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the cyclical nature of life and the search for meaning and purpose. He emphasizes that one generation passes and another comes, and that life seems to move in repetitive cycles. The speaker acknowledges the frustration of seeking satisfaction and purpose through material possessions, as they ultimately prove empty and fleeting. He then points to Jesus as the source of true rest, peace, and satisfaction, inviting listeners to come to Him for a deeper understanding of life's meaning and purpose.

Transcript

Ecclesiastes, it is important to remember that this is human wisdom and understanding. He is writing now as a humanist. He forsook the God of his fathers.

Solomon had disobeyed God and had married many wives. God said that when you have a king, they're not to multiply wives unto themselves. Solomon disobeyed God and had 700 wives.

Now God said the reason why they weren't to multiply wives is that these wives would turn their minds away from God. That's what his wives did. Many of his wives he married just for the sake of policy or politics.

In making a treaty with a king, he'd marry the king's daughter to seal the treaty. But in time, these wives began to lead Solomon into the worshiping of their gods. And Solomon forsook the God of his fathers and began to worship these other strange gods which were really no gods.

And as the result in the latter end of his life, he had become a very bitter, disappointed, cynical man. He'd come to the place where he actually was so cynical that he wrote, better is the day in which one dies than the day in which he is born. And the book of Ecclesiastes reflects much of this cynicism that comes from humanism.

Just to look at the life and the world under the sun. And so that's one of the words and themes you'll run through in the book of Ecclesiastes. He's talking about life under the sun.

Oh, what a monotonous, dull routine. It just, everything seems to move in cycles. One generation passes and another generation comes on.

And you forget the previous generation. The sun rises in the morning, sets in the evening, and then hastens around to where it rose again. And each day the sun comes up and goes down.

And so the rain falls from the heavens and into the rivers and out into the sea. And then it's carried back up and it takes the whole cycle over again. And so you have the rain cycle.

Then he talks about the monotony of the winds. They blow from the south, they complete their circuit, and they blow back in from the south again. And so he talks about just the life seems to move in cycles.

He said, you can't do anything but what hasn't already been done, for there is nothing new under the sun. Everything is just one monotonous routine. I think it was Tex Ritter that used to sing, life gets so tedious, don't it? You know, and just talking about how, you know, just you seem to get in a routine and things just sort of get monotonous and they sort of grind after a while.

So here's a man who's been going through the grinding monotony of life apart from God. Life on the human level, life under the sun. And so now he writes in his later years with cynicism, with despair, with a hopelessness, with bitterness.

And one of the reoccurring themes through the entire book of Ecclesiastes is vanity, vanity, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. To modernize the English, emptiness, emptiness. Everything is empty and frustrating.

And thus the description of life of a humanist, life on the human level, earth bound life, life under the sun has as its consequence emptiness and frustration. Man is in a search for meaning. There is within us a consciousness and awareness that life certainly must be more than what I've yet experienced.

This certainly isn't all that there is. Life must have some further purpose than just the daily routine, the eight to five and the dinner and go to bed and the look forward to vacation and it must be more than this. And within us we have a consciousness that life does and should have purpose, life should have meaning.

A meaning more than what we have yet experienced and so we find ourselves reaching out, seeking to discover the purpose, seeking to discover the meaning of life. And so many times we rest under the delusion that if I just had enough money then I could be happy and satisfied. And so we strive for material possessions, thinking that material possessions will bring to us a sense of satisfaction and peace.

But they don't. And so we think well it lies in understanding and in knowledge. And so we get on the old education kit and we take every course that we can you know get into and and we seek to fill our minds with an understanding.

Thinking if I can just understand enough and know enough about myself and about life then surely I will find the answer. But it won't bring it. And so then we find ourselves delving into pleasures and into sensations and into experiences and trying to find some some excitement and some pleasure that will

bring to me satisfaction.

But it can't. And so we turn from one thing to another to another to another trying to find meaning in life, trying to find something that will bring me a rest, a peace, a satisfaction. And so many times after our pursuits like Solomon we end up just with a bitterness and a frustration.

Solomon was searching for meaning. Now he had an opportunity to carry his searches out to the end results. Now we many times don't.

We think oh I just had enough money and we spend our whole life just thinking that. And because we never have enough money we always think well that would have been it. You know had I had enough then I would have been happy.

I would have found it. But I never was happy because I never got that place. But Solomon it said made gold as as common as rocks in Jerusalem.

He said I amassed to myself possessions more than anybody before me. He amassed unto himself this great wealth. And then he said I looked at it and I said it is emptiness.

And so he turned himself from the wealth and he said I gave my heart to know wisdom and understanding until I attained greater knowledge and understanding than anyone before me. And so he wrote books on botany. He wrote books on biology.

He wrote books on life because he had studied and learned all of these things. And he said I looked at it and I said what is it? It's emptiness. It's frustrating.

He said because with increased wisdom all you're doing is adding to your grief and with increased knowledge is increased sorrow. In other words you're better off many times not to know so much because you're a happier person. The more you know the sorrier.

I'm sure this is true about world affairs. The more I read the newspapers the sorrier it makes me you know. The more I know about what's happening in the world really it's tragic.

When I was a kid I used to see written in the books in school you know with that in case of fire throw this in first and stuff like that. But there was one of those that said the more you learn the more you forget. The more you forget the less you know.

So what's the use of learning? Which sort of expresses that cycle of monotony that Solomon was talking about. With increased knowledge is increased sorrow. Actually it's sort of a frustrating thing to make knowledge your goal because you know what the more you know the more you know you don't know.

The guy who thinks he knows it all knows the least. But the more you study any particular subject the more you get into it the more you realize there's so much to know there you can never know it. It's like Shakespeare said man poor man so ignorant in that which he knows best.

And so Solomon gave himself to wisdom to understanding that he might know and he says what is it it's empty because the more I know increased knowledge only increases my sorrow. And in much wisdom is much grief. So then he gave himself unto building projects.

If I can just leave some great monument with my name inscribed upon it and they can say that you know is the monument with your name inscribed. And so Solomon started building. He said I built the great buildings.

When we were in Jerusalem we went under the old city near Herod's Gate. There's a cave entrance there and you can go underneath and there are these vast caverns. Huge caves under there where Solomon had taken the limestone had quarried the limestone for the building of the walls and for the building of the temple.

And you can go for miles under the city in these huge caverns and you can see the marvelous engineering and the art and all under there where they were carving out all these things. You can see the places where they had driven this made their holes and then driven the stakes and then fill them with water to cause them to expand and fracture the rock. And you can see it under the city there that Solomon did and it's called Solomon's Quarries.

He built these great buildings. He built the stables and you can see the stables over a thousand stables for his horses. You can see the ruins of them today.

When we were out just the other side of Bethlehem towards Hebron we stopped and there we saw some beautiful pools of water. They were reservoirs and actually these were the reservoirs that Solomon built almost 3,000 years ago. He said that he planted orchards and then he said he made pools to water the orchards in his gardens.

And these reservoirs that Solomon built 3,000 years ago are still in use today and you can still see the old aqueduct that Solomon built to bring the water from these reservoirs into the city of Jerusalem to water the orchards and the gardens that he made. This guy was a fabulous engineer and just a brilliant man and he built all of these marvelous things, reservoirs that are still used to the present day and he said, I looked at them all and they said they were empty and they brought me emptiness. They didn't bring me fulfillment at all.

It just left me empty and frustrated. So he determined the only thing is just bomb yourself out. Give yourself to joy and pleasure.

Just drink yourself into oblivion because there's no purpose or reason for life. And he became bitter and he ended it by saying in verse 17 of chapter 2, therefore I hated life. A man who had glutted himself with every conceivable pleasure.

A man who had filled himself with knowledge. A man who had built tremendous monuments. A man who had all of the wealth, more wealth than a person could possibly spend.

How does he end up? Bitter, disappointed. Therefore I hated life because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me. For all is empty and frustrating.

Why is it that man feels this emptiness? Why is it that almost universally man has this emptiness within and this consciousness of life must be more. This reaching out for something yet beyond. In reality the Bible tells us that this is the way God designed us.

In Romans the 8th chapter in the 20th verse it declares, for the creature was made subject unto emptiness. Not willingly but by reason of him who created him. In other words, God when he designed

man for his own purposes and for his own plans, when he designed us and created us, he created us with a hollow spot inside.

He designed us with an inbuilt emptiness. And that's just the way we've been created by God himself. He built this emptiness within us and so man was made subject unto emptiness by the reason of him who created him.

Why would God create us with this emptiness? Why would God create us with this desire to be satisfied but yet never seeming to be able to find that satisfaction? Why would God build such a diabolical thing within us that would leave us always reaching out for something more? Because God when he created you, created you for fellowship and he wants you to know his fellowship. He wants you to know his love. And so within the deepest part of you he made this emptiness in order that you might because of the emptiness reach out for him and touch him and fellowship with him and through this fellowship find the fullness that he has for you.

But God built it in. Now when God made man, he made man a threefold being. Body, soul, and spirit.

The real me is spirit. I possess a soul or consciousness. I live in a body.

The real me is not this body. It's only a tent in which I'm dwelling for a while. One day before long I'm going to move out of this tent into a building that's not been made with hands that God has made for me in heaven and has waiting for me.

It's reserved up there. It's got my name on it. And it's prepared directly from God and it's such a vast improvement over this old tent.

It's just like moving out of that old patched up tent with a leaky roof and all into this new sanctuary. Cold, wintry days where we're there in that tent where the furnace is roaring and all. Now here we are sitting in comfort.

And I'm going to move out of this old patched up tent one of these days. I'll still be me. I'll still possess my consciousness, my spirit, but I will have been delivered from this body.

And I know that when the earthly tent is dissolved, I have a building of God not made with hands eternal in the heavens. Every once in a while I really get to groaning in this body after playing football, you know, and not having done it for a long time. You get all those sore muscles.

You do groan and it's a desire to be delivered. Not that I would be unclothed. Paul said that I might be clothed upon, but that body was just in heaven.

For I know that as long as I'm at home in this body, I'm absent from the Lord, but I would much rather be absent from this body and be present with the Lord. Now in making me a three-fold being, he has so integrated my body, soul, and spirit that it's really difficult to divide between them. Whatever affects my body affects my mind.

Whatever affects my body affects my spirit. Whatever affects my mind affects my body. My body and mind are very closely related.

Whatever affects my mind affects my spirit. Whatever affects my spirit affects my body. Whatever affects my spirit affects my mind.

And so I'm so interrelated that I can't really divide between the three of them you see. That's why when your spirit is renewed through Jesus Christ, it affects you every way. It affects your whole mental outlook, your whole attitude, your emotions.

It also affects you physically because you can't really separate between the two or three. They're interrelated. And yet though I am so closely interrelated body, soul, and spirit, yet my body has its own needs, my soul has its own needs, and my spirit has its own needs.

As far as my body, I need air, I need water, I need food. As far as my psyche or my soul, my psyche, I need love, I need security, I need to be needed, and I have my psychological needs. Now as far as my spirit goes, my spirit also has its needs and my spirit needs God.

My spirit needs a vital relationship with God. Now I know that my body cannot live without food, that that's basic to my body life. Food is essential and basic.

Air, essential and basic. Water, essential and basic to my body needs. And my body without air, without water, without food will die.

So my spirit without God is dead. Without a meaningful relationship with God, my spirit lies there dead within me. And I'm living now purely on the human level.

I'm living as a humanist. And what I see, what I touch, what I feel, that makes up my life purely on the material human level. But my spirit being dead, I live empty and frustrated.

Because life on the human level is a monotony, a bore after a while. It's a grind. And so Solomon on the human level, the spirit of this life under the sun, it's empty, it's frustrating, I hate life, it's better the day you die than the day you were born.

And so the emptiness of man lies within the realm of his spirit. And my spirit is crying out for life, for God. Now here is where many people make their mistake.

Because they try to satisfy a spiritual cry and a spiritual need with a physical experience. It will never do it. You can never satisfy the spiritual thirst within with a physical experience.

Nor can you satisfy that spiritual need with a psychic experience. Now what can we say of physical experiences? This, they're not lasting. You know, you can go home and you can sit down and eat to your full of your favorite foods.

Oh, wow. I've always wanted to eat all the banana cream pie I could hold, you know. And you can just shovel it down until you just have to hold the last bite in your mouth because there's no room to swallow.

And you can sit there in absolute misery. Your stomach's so full and afraid almost to talk or open your mouth. Just miserable.

And thinking to yourself, how could I have been such a nut? And just in misery thinking, I never want to look at a piece of pie again as long as I live. But in another five or six hours, you'll be back picking at it again, you know. What's that? Well, you were so full, but you're never going to eat again.

Oh, but I'm getting hungry. So physical experiences are not lasting. What can you say concerning emotional experiences? They're not lasting.

When I was in college, I used to be the idea man. And so the guys every evening would come over to my room and say, hey, Chuck, what should we do tonight for excitement? And so I would have a little scheme all cooked up. And we did some of the dopest things for excitement.

I'd share them with our kids here. In no sense giving them ideas. But we'd go out to Hollywood Boulevard and, you know, there's always a bunch of people out there that are, you know, just walking around looking for movie stars.

And so that's crazy. We'd have one guy come walking down the street and we'd all run up and say, hey, can I have your autograph? You know, start getting his autograph. And pretty soon everybody's crawling around getting his autograph.

Don't even know who he is. And he'd sign Mickey Mouse, you know, but everybody's clamoring for an autograph. And we'd just go, you know, after it's all through, we'd just go down the street, just laughing, you know, just, you know, just so funny.

And we'd laugh so hard we'd ache. And we'd stop by Bob's on the way home and still just be laughing and having the greatest time that we were laughing about it. And then go home, go to bed, just laughing, you know, as you go to sleep.

And the next night, you know, you have such laughter, such fun, you think, wow, you know, this laugh will last all night. The next night, knock on the door, hey Chuck, what are we going to do tonight? Oh, you had an exhilarating emotional experience last night, you know, hilarious, but it doesn't last. You got to go back, back, back again, again, again.

It's frustrating. Always empty. Never seems to stay full.

You might fill it up for a moment, but it just doesn't stay full. It somehow just drains out. And so you're back at it again.

Sitting at the table again. Every time you sit at the table, remember that physical things just can't fill you. And you can sit there, you can be full for a moment, but after you go away for a while, it just has a way of dissipating and here you are hungry again.

So is life. It's empty. It's frustrating.

You try to fill it, you can't maintain it. It has a way of getting away from you. And after a while, you get just frustrated with it all.

But Salome, you say, it's so frustrating. Life just moves in the cycles and you're just one part of a cycle and your generation's going to pass and they're going to forget all about you. The next generation's going to come on.

It's just cycle after cycle after cycle. What can I do? Did God build into me this capacity just to mock me? Did God build this emptiness in so that he could somehow just get a fiendish delight in man's endless quest? No. Jesus said, if any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.

And he who believes in me, out of his innermost being, there will flow, or there will gut. You see, as long as my spirit is empty, I can never be satisfied. As long as your spirit is dead, you're at the best only two thirds of a person.

You're living on a body and soul each level. That's always an empty, temporary thing. You may have a high today, but tomorrow you'll be leveled out again.

It's always such a temporary thing. It's not a lasting thing. Living on the purely physical level, mental and material level, is just an empty, frustrating life.

It's only when you add the dimension of the spirit that you add now a permanency, something that doesn't fade away, something that doesn't dissipate with time. For the work of God within our spirit is an eternal work. And when I come into a relationship with God, I become alive spiritually.

And because I am integrated, that spiritual life begins to affect my mental outlook, my emotions, and it begins to affect me physically, and I become a total whole person, body, soul, and spirit. But it's because the spirit has come alive. This is the record, John said, that God has given to us eternal life, not just this temporary transient thing.

God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in the Son. And he that hath the Son hath. God built this emptiness in you so that you would seek after God, so that you would discover God, so that you would come into fellowship with God, and through this fellowship be benefited by receiving spiritual life, which is true life, by your spirit coming alive and making you now a total whole person.

How many times Jesus said to those that came to him, thy faith hath made thee whole. They receive more than just the physical healing, they receive the wholeness in their life. And it's important that God touch you in more than just the material, physical, emotional realms.

It's important that your spirit be touched by God and that you be brought to a wholeness through Jesus Christ. And as you do, you're brought now into a relationship with God. What's the effect? That empty area that never seemed to be full, or you could never seem to fill it, all of a sudden your cup begins to run over.

You're so full you can't contain it. And so David said, my cup run over. You're so full, like Jesus said, it begins to flow forth like rivers of living water, like a living well, like a well of living water springing up within your soul, he says.

You find that this glorious inner working of God's spirit just bubbling out and just coloring your whole life and everyone around you. You find meaning, you find purpose, you find satisfaction. Jesus said, come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That word rest is peace. You'll find the peace, you'll find the satisfaction, you'll find the purpose in me, when you come to Jesus Christ. You say, well, it's a chunk.

I'll just say, I can't find that. I can't understand how just believing in Jesus can make such changes in my life. And I just can't enter into something that I can't understand.

And you say, just believing in Jesus is going to make all these changes, but I don't understand how that can do it. And I just don't like to mess around with things I don't understand. Well, let me tell you something.

I don't understand how that down here in Indian Beach, they can have a steam generator turning these turbines that'll send electrical power through a wire into my home. But all I have to do is flip a switch and I can have all kinds of conveniences within my house. My furnace will run and keep my house warm

because of the fan and all.

How that I can walk over and turn on a switch and have light in my house. Now, wouldn't it be sort of stupid for me to sit in a cold, dark house saying, well, I don't believe in doing anything I can't understand. Now, I don't understand how that turning of that switch will bring the juice from Honeydew Beach electrical plant, how it can come through all the wires and light and all.

I can understand a certain basics of electricity and I know of Cullen's law of electricity and I say this, but yet I don't understand it all. There's so many facets of it that it's just a mystery to me. Whether or not the power travels in the wire or around the wire and how these charges are coming through, I don't know.

And I guess they don't know either. I don't understand it, but boy, I'll tell you, I sure do. In the same token, I don't understand how God does all the things he does for me.

I don't understand God's love. I don't understand God's concern. I don't understand the working of God in my life, but I'll tell you, I sure enjoy it.

I just really thoroughly enjoy what God is doing for he has brought to me a complete satisfaction. Rest, meaning, purpose, and you'll do the same for you. You don't have to understand it.

For Jesus said, he who believes out of his innermost being. Thank you, Father, that you have brought purpose and meaning to life. You're the reason, Lord, for living.

Thank you that you have brought us life itself, spiritual life. You made us alive to your love and to your goodness. Oh, how we thank you, Lord, that we have this life and that he has brought to us this peace in this realm, the real meaning of life, fulfillment.

Thank you. May your Holy Spirit, Father, bring your truth now to our heart and to these that are still searching, these that are still coming up so empty, may they end their search today at the foot of Jesus Christ. May they receive the life we ask of you, Jesus.

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