

Vanity of Vanities

by Michael Wigglesworth

The sermon emphasizes the vanity and emptiness of the world, and the futility of seeking happiness and fulfillment in earthly things.

Scripture: Psalm 39:6, Ecclesiastes 1:2, Matthew 16:26, Colossians 3:2, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Worldly Pursuits", "Loving God"

Description

Michael Wigglesworth delivers a powerful sermon on the emptiness and fleeting nature of worldly pursuits, highlighting how man's best estate is still filled with restlessness and vanity. He emphasizes the temporary nature of beauty, pleasure, friendships, riches, and honor, all of which ultimately lead to disappointment and dissatisfaction. Wigglesworth urges his listeners to seek a higher portion above, where true contentment and fulfillment can be found in loving God, as everything else in this world is but empty shadows and deceitful toys.

Transcript

A Song of Emptiness

To Fill up the Empty Pages Following

Vain, frail, short liv'd, and miserable Man,

Learn what thou art when thine estate is best:

A restless Wave o'th' troubled Ocean,

A Dream, a lifeless Picture finely drest:

A Wind, a Flower, a Vapour, and a Bubble,

A Wheel that stands not still, a trembling Reed,

A rolling Stone, dry Dust, light Chaff, and Stubble,

A Shadow of Something, but nought indeed.

Learn what deceitful Toyes, and empty things,

This World, and all its best Enjoyments bee:
Out of the Earth no true Contentment springs,
But all things here are vexing Vanitee.
For what is Beauty, but a fading Flower?
Or what is Pleasure, but the Devils bait,
Whereby he catcheth whom he would devour,
And multitudes of Souls doth ruinate?
And what are Friends but moral men, as we?
Whom Death from us may quickly separate;
Or else their hearts may quite estranged be,
And all their love be turned into hate.
And what are Riches to be doted on?
Uncertain, fickle, and ensnaring things;
They draw Mens Souls into Perdition,
And when most needed, take them to their wings.
Ah foolish Man! that sets his heart upon
Such empty Shadows, such wild Fowl as these,
That being gotten will be quickly gone,
And whilst they stay increase but his disease.
As in a Dropsie, drinking draughts begets,
The more he drinks, the more he still requires:
So on this World whoso affection sets,
His Wealths encrease encreaseth his desires.
O happy Man, whose portion is above,
Where Floods, where Flames, where Foes cannot bereave him,
Most wretched man, that fixed hath his love
Upon this World, that surely will deceive him!

For, what is Honour? What is Sov'raignty,
Whereto mens hearts so restlessly aspire?
Whom have they Crowned with Felicity?
When did they ever satisfie desire?
The Ear of Man with hearing is not fill'd:
To see new sights still coveteth the Eye:
The craving Stomack though it may be still'd,
Yet craves again without a new supply.
All Earthly things, man's Cravings answer not,
Whose little heart would all the World contain,
(If all the World should fall to one man's Lot)
And notwithstanding empty still remain.
The Eastern Conquerour was said to weep,
When he the Indian Ocean did view,
To see his Conquest bounded by the Deep,
And no more Worlds remaining to subdue.
Who would that man in his Enjoyments bless,
Or envy him, or covet his estate,
Whose gettings do augment his greediness,
And make his wishes more intemperate?
Such is the wonted and the common guise
Of those on Earth that bear the greatest Sway:
If with a few the case be otherwise
They seek a Kingdom that abides for ay.
Moreover they, of all the Sons of men,
That Rule, and are in highest places set,
Are most inclin'd to scorn their Bretheren

And God himself (without great grace) forget.
For as the Sun doth blind the gazer's eyes,
That for a time they nought discern aright:
So Honour doth befool and blind the Wise,
And their own Lustre 'reaves them of their sight.
Great are their Dangers, manifold their Cares;
Thro which, whilst others Sleep, they scarcely Nap
And yet are oft surprized unawares,
And fall unwitting into Envies Trap!
The mean Mechanick finds his kindly rest,
All void of fear Sleepeth the Country-Clown,
When greatest Princes often are distrest,
And cannot Sleep upon their Beds of Down.
Could Strength or Valour men Immortalize,
Could Wealth or Honour keep them from decay,
There were some cause the same to Idolize,
And give the lye to that which I do say.
But neither can such things themselves endure
Without the hazard of a Change one hour,
Nor such as trust in them can they secure
From dismal dayes, or Deaths prevailing pow'r.
If Beauty could the beautiful defend
From Death's dominion, then fair Absalom
Had not been brought to such a shameful end:
But fair and foul unto the Grave must come.
If Wealth or Scepters could Immortal make,
Then wealthy Croesus, wherefore are thou dead?

If Warlike force, which makes the World to quake,
Then why is Julius Caesar perished?
Where are the Scipio's Thunder-bolts of War?
Renowned Pompey, Caesars Enemy?
Stout Hannibal, Rome's Terror known so far?
Great Alexander, what's become of thee?
If Gifts and Bribes Death's favour might but win,
If Power, if force, or Threatnings might it fray,
All these, and more, had still surviving been:
But all are gone, for Death will have no Nay.
Such is this World with all her Pomp and Glory,
Such are the men whom worldly eyes admire:
Cut down by Time, and now become a Story,
That we might after better things aspire.
Go boast thy self of what thy heart enjoys,
Vain Man! triumph in all thy worldly Bliss:
Thy best enjoyments are but Trash and Toys:
Delight thy self in that which worthless is.
Omnia Praetereunt praeter amare Deum.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-wigglesworth/vanity-of-vanities/>

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