



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

22 – Vanity Revisited

Announcements:

6/26 @6:30 -

Grace Group

6/30 @8:30 -

Sunday School

6/30 @6:00 -

Family

Game Night

7/21 -

Registration

Closes for

CLARUS

ICE BREAKER: What has been one lesson that you have learned from the book of Ecclesiastes?

READ: Ecclesiastes 1:2 and Ecclesiastes 12:8

When Studying any portion of Scripture, be it a verse, a chapter or in this case, a whole book, one of the things that can be helpful in understanding the point of what is being said is looking at “the tip and the tail”, or the very beginning and the very end. Here in Ecclesiastes a quick look at the tip and the tail like we just did reveal one (kinda depressing) thought at the center of Ecclesiastes: that all is vanity. In fact, if we remember all the way back to Ecclesiastes 1 “vanity of vanities” means “the most vain thing of all the vain things in the universe”. So as we draw to the end of this book, it would be good for us to take a step back and evaluate what we have learned about vanity.

At the beginning of Ecclesiastes we saw the vanity of life in general. To remind us: Life seeking after pleasure was vain, but life seeking wisdom was also vain, even a diligent hard working life was, you guessed it, vain. Life is vain for a host of reasons, because it is short, because it doesn’t always make sense and the foolish and the wise all face the same fate. Solomon used the vanity of life to try and show us really one important thing: seeking after anything other than God will leave us empty and wanting, because all else is pure vanity!

DISCUSS: Why was it important for Solomon to show us that everything in life fails and is vain?

Then we moved to the most famous, and in many ways the most important, portion of Ecclesiastes. In chapter 3 we read the “Time Poem” and learned that there was a “time for every matter under heaven.” Here the point was that we live this life but ultimately have no control over anything that is happening to us. There is a time to work and time to die and it happens to us not as *we* want, but as God directs. In other words, there is a vanity of life that is compounded by a vanity of our place. Like a friend who loves us enough to be honest with us Solomon hits us with many painful truths. Good things happen to bad people, bad things happen to good people, people die and don’t receive the reward for their labor and some fool then reaps the rewards. Our place in this life is to walk forward in the places God has called us too, no matter how hard or “unfair” those things may be.

DISCUSS: Why is it so hard for us to acknowledge that our place is not a place of control?

Finally we moved to what I would call the “vanity of not knowing”. Here in the final section of Ecclesiastes I have felt like a broken record reading over and over (and over!) again that “we do not know” why this is happening, or how that works, or if we will live to see this or that. This is, in many ways, the culmination of all the vanities that come before. Life is vain but it is better to be wise. I might be able to live with that, but then Solomon tells us that ultimately, we “do not know which will prosper” (Ecclesiastes 10:6). So we might begin to think: so what’s the point? We have a palace where we are not in control of anything, but there might be hope in seeing and knowing at least what the bigger picture is. Here again the answer is vanity, because “man cannot find out the work that is done.” (Ecclesiastes 8:17). As Solomon has been getting us to see, it is really all just vanity.

DISCUSS: What parts of not knowing weigh heaviest on you? Why is this particular vanity so difficult sometimes?

But before we end here I would like to spend a few moments talking about what I would call “the joy of vanity”. On one hand we could call this book depressing, on the other we could call it cathartic. There is a joy in realizing what Solomon has been teaching us about the vanity of life, because it allows us to see and worship the God who is sovereign over all the vanities of this life. Life is vain and sometimes pointless, unless we remember that we are made to worship God and that he has created us for “good works that he has prepared in advance, that we should walk in them.” Our place is vain, but it is the palace that the God who made us, and loves us, has placed us in, so in that I can rejoice. I know nothing, nothing other than the good things that God has promised me that is. And that is not just OK, but good. Praise be that God knows all and takes that burden and I can just live in the place that he has called me. The realization of our vanity gives way to the realization of God’s goodness and grace. And for that we can rejoice!

DISCUSS: In what ways has hearing of the vanity of our lives been good for you and your soul?