

Vanity / (10.31.2021)

Ever since the local paper has taken to making money on obituaries by charging a fee, they have taken on unique characteristics. You can spot the ones that are for important, rich people; often they fill a half-page or more. Those for working class schmucks are a bit more mundane. But, all are a gigantic public relations effort to take the mind away from the truthfulness of Psalm 62:9: **Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.**

[Men of low degree] are most vain, impotent, and helpless creatures in themselves. This he delivers as a reason, or argument, to enforce his foregoing exhortation to trust in God, because there was no other person or thing to which they could safely trust. Men of high degree are a lie — That is, deceitful; because unable to perform what by their power and dignity they seem to promise. They raise men's expectations, and afterward disappoint them, and so deceive those that trust in them. (Benson).

Adam has a son named Hebel (Abel), which means "vanity." It's symbolic of all his sons, but **men of low degree** are those that are poor and low in the world, such as we see in Isaiah 2:9: **And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.** Similarly, Psalm 49:2, in describing the inhabitants of the world, says: **Both low and high, rich and poor, together.** They are subject to sinful vanity; their thoughts are vain, their affections vain, their minds vain, their conversation vain, sinful, foolish, fallacious and inconstant. Gill obviously was not concerned with political correctness when he said the *wicked poor, generally speaking, of all persons, (are) the most wicked, and therefore, though they are the multitude, they are not to be trusted in.*

In this calendar year called 2021, I and others in this church's congregation are experiencing their 50 year anniversary since graduating

from high school. Such is a time for reflection and thought unique to the occasion.

In addition to class reunions, there are various other activities attending this occasion, such as former classmates submitting blurbs about their current lives. I recently had occasion to scan a few of those writings and one reaction hit me. I asked my wife (who is also at the 50-year spot) what one word jumped out while reading those narratives and she said "retire." Now, true enough, "retire", "retired" and "retirement" frequently surfaced. But that's not the one word that reached out and grabbed me. That word? VANITY!

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

I looked on all the works, &c. — I made a serious review of my former works and labours, and considered whether I had obtained that satisfaction in them which I had expected to find; and behold, all was vanity — I found myself disappointed, and wholly dissatisfied in this course. And there was no profit, &c. — The pleasure was past, and I was never the better for it, but as empty as before. (Benson)

Fifty years is a long time. One does a lot of work and labor during that time. Yet it goes quickly and you sometimes ask, "Where has the time gone?" Big chunks of time evaporate. Chapters belonging in the Table of Contents of your life's book disappear. You look back; you behold it all, and indeed it is vanity and it is a vexation of mind and spirit. **Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. (Ecclesiastes 2:17, 18).**

You ask is this kind of thinking what I have to look forward to for my upcoming school reunions? Does this not put a whole new meaning to the concept of slough of despondency? But I'm just getting started. Listen: **Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. * * * For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.** (Ecclesiastes 2:20, 22, 23).

But the preacher lands on his feet before this chapter ends, as we read: **There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.** (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26).

The one joy of working or receiving, which, though it be transitory, a man recognizes as a real good, even that is not in the power of man to secure for himself: that good is the gift of God. (Barnes). This blessing is a singular gift from God and is not procured by man's own wisdom or diligence. But no credit is given.

Many of these high school mates have died. Many of those still living are heavy into material things; houses, real estate, cabins, boats, vacation spots, cars, horses, etc. There seems to be little if any attention to eternity, God and final judgment. **He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.** (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

In the natural flow of life's events, people who have been out of high school for a half-century will likely have more wealth than young adults. But if God is not blessing you in all things spiritual and physical, it is hollow. **There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.** (Ecclesiastes 6:1, 2). The ungrateful person here described does not credit God for his blessings, disregards spiritual and eternal things, and the result is that all of his material wealth eventually goes to strangers. Be thankful to God for each and every blessing we receive at his hand, every day!!

The prophet Jeremiah bemoaned such a condition. **Thus saith the Lord, what iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?** (Jeremiah 2:5). And David the psalmist felt this down deep when he said [s]urely every man walketh in a vain shew (phantom): surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. (Psalm 39:6).

Here's the antidote: **And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee: Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. * * * O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.** (Psalm 39:7, 8, 13).

The Preacher (Convener; calling together an assembly of people to address) was simply overwhelmed with thoughts of this life, its cycles, its hardships, and his pronouncements are worthy of consideration and are akin to what we experience in times of reflection:

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

²Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

³ What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

⁴ One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

⁵ The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

⁶ The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

⁷ All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

⁸ All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

⁹ The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

¹² I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

¹³ And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

¹⁵ That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

¹⁶ I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

¹⁷ And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. (Ecclesiastes Chapter 1; emphasis added).

That word “vanity” (Hebel, “Abel”) as used in this text means unstable, not abiding, breath or vapor. It is used 37 times in Ecclesiastes, and only 33 times in the rest of the Old Testament.

The core of the preacher’s words is found at verse 2 of chapter 1; please repose in Matthew Henry’s helpful writings related to that verse:

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. It was no new text; his father David had more than once spoken to the same purport. The truth itself here asserted is, that all is vanity, all besides God and considered as abstract from him, the all of this world, all worldly employments and enjoyments, the all that is in the world (1 Jn. 2:16), all that which is agreeable to our senses and to our fancies in this present state, which gains pleasure to ourselves or reputation with others. It is all vanity, not only in the abuse of it, when it is perverted by the sin of man, but even in the use of it. Man, considered with reference to these things, is vanity (Ps. 39:5, 6), and, if there were not another life after this, were made in vain (Ps. 89:47); and those things, considered in reference to man (whatever they are in themselves), are vanity. They are impertinent to the soul, foreign, and add nothing to it; they do not answer the end, nor yield any true satisfaction; they are uncertain in their continuance, are fading, and perishing, and passing away, and will certainly deceive and disappoint those that put a confidence in them. Let us not

therefore love vanity (Ps. 4:2), nor lift up our souls to it (Ps. 24:4), for we shall but weary ourselves for it, Heb. 2:13.

Always remember this life of vanity is short. At times it feels like it goes on forever, but the truth is: **Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?** (Psalm 89:47). Looking back, those 50 years went fast. **For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.** (James 4:14). As I said, big chunks of time evaporate.

Dust we are and a shadow. Life is something peculiarly frail. The word "vapor" in this text connotes a fine mist, an exhalation, a smoke. Consider this poignant comment from Barnes on this "vapor": *such a vapor as we see ascending from a stream, or as lies on the mountain side on the morning, or as floats for a little time in the air, but which is dissipated by the rising sun, leaving not a trace behind.*

Grass we are, and withered grass at that. Flowers we are, and faded flowers at that. The prophet Isaiah brilliantly conveys these thoughts, together with the triumphant end to it all for the Lord's sheep, in the opening verses of chapter 40:

40 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

² Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³ The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

⁶ The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

⁷ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

⁸ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

⁹ O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

¹¹ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 1:1-11).

Life's time landmarks bring these thoughts to the surface, though they lie just below our conscious every day. There will not be another 50-year high school reunion for this guy. There might be a 60-year; might not. There might be more birthdays or wedding anniversaries, might not. Whatever the case, these truths are rock solid ancient landmarks. Count on it!

The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:22).

Lord's Supper (10.31.2021)

Bible passages to consider during administration of the Lord's Supper:

Mark 14:22-26 --

22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, **Take, eat: this is my body.**

23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it.

24 And he said unto them, **This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.**

25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

John 6:53-58 –

53 Then Jesus said unto them, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.**

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

1 Corinthians 10:15-22 –

15 I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

17 For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

18 Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?

20 But I *say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

22 Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 –

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

1 Peter 2:21-25 –

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Isaiah Chapter 53 –

1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul

unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.