

“Vanity of Vanities!”

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A World of Vanity

“*Vanity of vanities,*’ says the preacher, *‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity’* (**Ecclesiastes 1:2**). What is this life? That is the fundamental question asked in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which leads the reader through a series of inquiries dealing with the utter emptiness of this existence. A season comes and a season goes. A man dies, a child is born. The rain falls down, flows to the sea, and once more returns to the clouds. What is the point behind all of it? Naturally, that question would mean nothing for an Atheist, that is, someone who does not believe in God. *“The mysteries of the world which meet man as a moral being remain, under this view of the world (atheism or pantheism), altogether without solution. For the moral order of the world presupposes an absolutely good being, from whom it has proceeded, and who sustains it”* (**Commentary On The Old Testament**, Vol. 6, Keil-Delitzsch, 179).

- The atheist is confronted with a problem that is unanswerable: what is the point behind it all? If we are to believe that there is no God, no afterlife, and no spiritual existence, then we are all just animals on this insignificant rock flying through space.
- The difference between believing in God and not is that when we have something meaningful to believe in, it gives us purpose. If God did not exist, then why be nice to anybody? Why not simply steal, obey our animal instincts, and do what we can to survive?
- Atheism makes all of our meaningful pursuits meaningless. Whether or not God exists, monuments are torn down, headstones crumble, and our names will disappear. At least if there is a God, then we have something more to look forward to than rotting in the ground.

“*Vanity of vanities*” is a phrase used to signify something with absolutely no point behind it – it serves no greater purpose. Vine describes it as “*emptiness as to results,*” like the way a man works in **1:3**. “*What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?*” When we think about how much we have to work in this world, and how little we end up receiving from it, all we can say is “Vanity!” Indeed, since the sin of Adam mankind has had to toil for his food (**Genesis 3:17-19**). For an entire season, a person may work in the field, and it may take months for a plant to mature and yield fruit. But all it takes is a few moments to eat that fruit – and a pestilence or swarm of locusts can destroy a year’s supply of food in a day. So much work for nothing!

Left Without A Point?

When confronted with such vanities, it is tempting to lose heart and consider ourselves hopeless. Yet we are given hope, even in the midst of such downright sadness. We need to realize the point being made by Solomon. He was a man with so much wealth and wisdom that he thought he could answer the age old question: how

can I be fulfilled in this world? Only after so many years of exploration and experimentation did he finally realize that the only answer is that there is no fulfillment in this world. He could not be happy with wealth, knowledge, sex, alcohol, monuments, or power – we can only be happy seeking our true purpose. *“The conclusion, when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person”* (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**).