

The Sum and Forecast and Great Conclusion. 11:17-12:14

by W.J. Erdman

The Preacher concludes that life under the sun is fleeting and ultimately meaningless without a relationship with God, and that the fear of God is the final and best conclusion of man under the sun.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 2:11, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Ecclesiastes 7:2, Ecclesiastes 11:9, Ecclesiastes 12:1, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Topics: "Vanity Of Life", "Fear Of God"

Description

In this sermon by W.J. Erdman, the Preacher reflects on the vanity of life under the sun, emphasizing the fleeting nature of earthly pursuits and the ultimate conclusion that all is vanity. Despite the search for meaning and fulfillment, the Preacher warns of the emptiness of life without fearing God and keeping His commandments in anticipation of judgment. The sermon delves into the contrast between the joys of youth and the sorrows of old age, highlighting the inevitability of darkness and the transience of earthly pleasures.

Transcript

Finally forecasting the future from the knowledge of the past, for

"old experience doth attain elusion.

To something like prophetic strain;

He sums up all that life under the sun is, at its best; and with mournful irony forewarns man and especially youth that "all that cometh is vanity." He is casting up the account; the sum of all is now set down; and at the same time the transition takes place to the highest and best conclusion, to fear God and keep His commandments and in view of judgment to come.

The summing up of life under the sun is this: "Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Note how here the love of this earthly life is shown in all that; "oh! to live on and not die, to be ever young, never old; pain and evil and death far away." "Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity."

In this mingled strain of tender sadness and solemn warning, - of vain regrets and miserable anticipations of the old age of a vainly-spent life, the Preacher closes the strange eventful Quest; lingering over the scenes in which the joys of youth, with which he began his search, and the sorrows and infirmities of old age, appear in melancholy contrast. Then, adding the supplement, he begins with the sadly familiar refrain, as if he had just heard the dying sigh of sorrowful old age: "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity."

That the fear of God is the final and best conclusion of man under the sun, is shown a moment later when the whole search is swept over with rapid review in the mind of the Preacher. The Vanity of life is distinctly revealed throughout the whole Book, before the Epilogue is spoken, and then, in this supplement, the law is seen, that should rule life under the sun and make it real and earnest; -- the law in obedience to which, "the Good that is Comely" would be found. Thus in abrupt endings and sudden returns to the one great question of the book, the Preacher keeps showing man to himself; so debating between the vanities of life and the gloom of the grave; between the contentment of ignorance and the worth of wisdom; between the vexations of riches and the miseries of poverty; between the orderly "times" of man and the "eternity" of God; between the wrongs which are not righted and the dead that can no longer be oppressed; between a distant God and a becoming worship; between the wonder that women worth the name are so scarce and the reason that things are as they are; between the pride and fragrant joys of family life and the event of death that comes to all; between the life-long possession of all manner of earthly good and the final lack of imposing obsequies and an honorable grave; between the problem of the proper conduct of life and the deeper mystery of the divine purpose and plan; between such, and manifold more earthly things like these, and things too high for mortal men, the Preacher keeps moving on to the high conclusion, ever revealing man as the creature of fitful moods, as "all things by turns," as "out of centre," as setting sail around his strange world, and coming back at last to the place he started from, too often but little wiser and no better.

All this varied experience and search can be no other than that of the natural man; of man under the heavens, who, having boxed the compass of all human speculations and vanities, and not knowing God as a Saviour, exclaims at last, "All is vanity." In his best and final conclusion, to fear God, it is seen that man and God are still far apart; what man is, under the sun, and what he ought to be, as one from above the sun, are two vastly different things. Through the whole book, nowhere under the sun is he seen to meet God, and even at the close, when standing on the topmost height of human thought, a vast heaven of separation and silence still cleaves between him and God, the Judge of all.

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