

The Vanities of the Wise Experimenter. 2:1-26

by W.J. Erdman

The sermon explores the vanity of life and the futility of seeking happiness through worldly pleasures and possessions, concluding that true happiness is not to be found in these things.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 2:17, Ecclesiastes 2:24, Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, Ecclesiastes 12:13

Topics: "Vanity Of Life", "Fleeting Earthly Pleasures"

Description

In this sermon by W.J. Erdman, the preacher delves into the journey of a Seeker who starts with youthful pleasure and mirth, seeking 'the good' in life's experiences but ultimately finds everything to be vanity. Despite guiding his heart with wisdom, the Seeker realizes that even wisdom and royal possessions do not bring lasting satisfaction. The preacher reflects on the madness and despair of human existence, where all earthly enjoyments and possessions are deemed worthless, leading to a conclusion of enjoying life's simple pleasures before God. However, this too is marred by the realization that someone else toiled for the possessions now enjoyed, highlighting the pervasive vanity in all human endeavors.

Transcript

When the Seeker does start, it is as if he were all unexperienced in the life under the sun. He begins where life begins, in youthful pleasure and mirth, trying to find "the good" in them; and he ends with old age and its burdens and ills. But note, as he proceeds from vanity to vanity, he is ever "guiding his heart with wisdom." In trying wild revelry, he "reins in" his flesh with wine; he does not throw the bridle on the neck of passion and appetite, when he would find what "good" there is in the intoxicating cup; he "keeps his head level." But "the good" is not found in mirth and its madness; "this, also, is Vanity."

And what a confirmation, of this verdict of the wise man, that poet gave, who feared not God and even denied His existence!

"We look before and after,

And pine for what is not;

Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell

Of saddest thought."

From this madness of the fleeting hour, the Seeker turns to the enjoyment of what, as royal possessions, may be more satisfying and enduring, but the verdict on all is "Vanity of Vanities;" and his very wisdom, because to the wise and to the fool the one event of death comes alike, makes life and all its labor more hateful to him than to other men.

In this the opening scene of this varied and all-touching experience, it is man, richest, highest, wisest, at his best, that is portrayed; and if life and all its wisdom and works is vanity with him, then it is for all under the sun. It is man who looks up indeed to the heavens, but knows not what is beyond except judgment; man with his mad follies and his blank despair; with his worn-out delights and his hate of life; with his lofty speculations and his profound ignorance; with his "sad sincerity" and his paralyzing skepticism; with his strange recoveries to a calmer mind and his resort to a dull or self-complacent contentment with his lot, which in turn becomes itself but vanity; and it is man, who, having discovered the vanity of all enjoyments, gross and sensual, refined and artistic, and feeling the sore vexation of all earthly possessions, declares, at last, wisdom to be the most vexatious and sorrowful possession of all, because it can only discover the worthlessness of all the rest.

In fact, to this wise man, the actions of men under the sun are seemingly sheer madness; it would seem at times as if all had gone insane. But wise and pre-eminent as he may be, and having, but a moment before, pronounced life to be hateful, he resorts, from his disappointing works and vanities, after all, to the conclusion he commends to all, "to eat and drink and make his soul enjoy good in his labor." He does it as before God; though, at times, in rather self-complacent, pharisaic mood; but this very conclusion is soon disturbed by the fact of a "vanity," inseparable from it, alas! somebody else, even a sinner, once labored and heaped up the goods which God's favorite now enjoys. "The Good," free from all vanity, has not been found.

Job once spoke of the same disposal of the goods of the rich oppressor, but with far different spirit; he took sides with God as just in all this; but this wise man puts himself in the sinner's place, and says of such laborious, vain, vicarious heaping up of goods, "This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

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