

“Under the Sun” (Ecclesiastes 1)(1.8.23)

Ecclesiastes 1 (NIV84) *Everything Is Meaningless*

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!”

says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless.”

3 What does man gain from all his labor
at which he toils under the sun?

4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.

5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.

⁷ All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.

⁸ All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.

The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.

⁹ What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say,
“Look! This is something new”?

It was here already, long ago;
it was here before our time.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of men of old,
and even those who are yet to come
will not be remembered

by those who follow.

Wisdom Is Meaningless

¹²I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

¹³I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! ¹⁴I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁵ What is twisted cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge."¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"Under the Sun"**

INTRODUCTION:

On Monday Night Football this week, the Buffalo Bills played the Cincinnati Bengals. The game was stopped early in the first quarter and has been declared a "No Contest." Why? It has been the lead story in the sports world all week. A Buffalo Bill's player (Damar Hamlin) made a tackle. He stood up afterwards, wobbled, and fell back down to the ground. He suffered from cardiac arrest.

According to the nation's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "every year, about 805,000 people in the United States have a heart attack. About 1 in 5 heart attacks are silent – the damage is done, but the person is not aware of it." In this case the whole world is aware of it. This heart attack has saturated sports talk radio and mainstream media too.

Why? First, it happened on the world stage because of television and internet coverage. Second, it is an unexpected event. There are many serious injuries in football because of the dramatic physical contact and requirements. A concussion or a neck injury is surely regrettable but not that unusual. Sometimes there are heart attacks at the high school level or less frequently at the college level; but, by the time a player reaches the professional ranks it is extremely rare. These

players are highly fit and have gone through many trials of affliction.

Third, everyone on the scene had to face the possibility of his death because an ambulance was called onto the field. The commentators and myself, had never seen that before. The medical professionals had to perform CPR. Not only did those on the field have to face the possibility of a tragic fatality – underlying it all, we were confronted with our own mortality.

There have been a lot of questions, a lot of questions. Did people respond properly? What would be the impact on teammates and even on all the other players in the league? Might the game be continued? Perish the thought. At least for a short time, perspectives were brought into proper alignment. There continue to be a lot of questions. Questions about values. Questions about life.

I could almost hear an undercurrent of King Solomon, the teacher, preacher, son of David, King in Jerusalem. Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NIV84)

³ What does man gain from all his labor
at which he toils under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (NIV84)

¹⁴I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

BODY:

Yesterday, we had a Celebration of Life for Ralph Shaffer. I shared with you last Sunday that he had gone to his heavenly reward. I didn't know Ralph well but I did know some important things. He served his country as an engineer in the US Army. He served his Lord here in this church, in the choir and other ways. Certainly, his family had questions. I have questions. I wonder why his last few years of life had to be in a memory unit? Many of you have been touched by a similar experience. Sometimes the answers to our questions cannot be answered in this place, under the sun, or under heaven. But, we continue to look for meaning in this life.

You may be more familiar with a different translation than the New International Version that uses the word meaningless. Most major English translations use the word vanity: Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ESV)

² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

We must first grasp this phrase if we are going to be able to get a handle on this scripture because it is central to the “meaning” and used 38 times in this book.

The Amplified Bible helps us see the intricacy of these words. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher.

“Vanity of vanities! All [that is done without God’s guidance] is vanity [futile, meaningless—a wisp of smoke, a vapor that vanishes, merely chasing the wind].”

It is ironic to me that even defining this phrase seems somewhat futile. And, I don’t think that is an accident. It is deliberate. We want and hunger for meaning and we are having trouble digesting the first bite.

Now some scholars argue against the word vanity because it naturally leads to the word vain. Here is the primary meaning with which you are likely familiar: having or showing an excessively high opinion of one's appearance, abilities, or worth. They see this diverting from the secondary meaning: producing no result; useless; having no meaning or likelihood of fulfillment.

I believe that there is a strong connection to the primary meaning of vain. We overestimate our abilities and our knowledge. That is why we used

Isaiah 55 in our Responsive Reading today – to remind us that as far as the heavens are higher than the earth, that is how far above us is the God of all creation.

You have heard the phrase that knowledge is power. If we can know the meaning of life, it would give us a sense of control. The futility of this is what the Teacher, preacher, searcher in the Book of Ecclesiastes is trying to demonstrate.

It is a vain attempt and there is vanity, false pride, in this pursuit. There is vanity in the desire to gain such control. In my personal testimony this truth bears out. For the first forty-five years of my life, that was my mindset. When I could figure out God, then I would believe. This was my pride in my own abilities and worth. It was vanity and kept me from the LORD. Now of course, I see it was foolishness, vanity of vanities.

Isaiah 55 applies in another way too. It contrasts in a significant way another common refrain of our Teacher: “under the sun,” which he uses 29 times. Human beings are limited in our capacity to see and comprehend. We trust our eyes and those eyes need light, the light of the sun. Under the sun is the boundary of comprehension that our Teacher sets.

Then in Ecclesiastes 1:5 (NIV84) he uses the sun in a different way.

⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.

The context here is the question, what does man gain from all his labor. Where is the progress? We live, we die. Each generation is displaced by the previous one. When we are young, we are sure we will leave our mark on the world, but reality tells a different story. Empires come and empires go. Fortunes are won and fortunes are lost. And, even if we do accomplish something, what was the cost? How many generations before it fades away like a mist, a vapor, a whisp of smoke.

How long has the sun be rising and setting? If you adhere to the New Earth doctrine, you might say 10,000 years. If you adhere to evolution and Old Earth theory, you might say four billion years. Is either answer more comforting? I think not.

Has the sun accomplished anything? In relation to the earth it is in the same place. Every day is the same. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year and what has been gained. Around and around the earth goes, circling the sun, but what of it? Does it matter to anyone? Does it matter at all?

For our special music today, John played "Here Comes the Sun" by George Harrison. If you look at the Bible Study assignment I sent you from RightNow Media, you can listen to the Beatles play it on a Youtube video with the Grand Canyon and the sun in all its grandeur as background.

Here is the story behind the song. It had been an especially long and cold winter in England. The Beatles were heavily involved in the business end of their music, celebrity, and fame. There were a lot of meetings, and lawyers, and accountants, and legal documents to sign. Additionally, he was dealing with relationship and health issues.

George Harrison got tired of it all and decided to play hooky from his toil. He had not picked up a guitar for a couple of weeks, but when he visited his friend Eric Clapton they were out in the backyard on a beautiful spring morning. Harrison started playing one of Clapton's acoustic guitars. Eric Clapton remembered, "we sat down at the bottom of the garden, looking out, and the sun was shining; it was a beautiful morning, and he began to sing the opening lines and I just watched this thing come to life."

Though this was written in 1969 it is still relevant and appealing today. Surprisingly, even those under 20 love this upbeat and magical song. As of

2021, "Here Comes the Sun" was the most streamed Beatles song on Spotify. When you consider the renown and popularity of the Beatles, this is really significant. It is a highly acclaimed song by critics and fans alike.

You could argue that it has become part of our culture. I was playing Pickleball in Brigantine this week on a gray and overcast day. After a while, the sun tried to poke its way through the clouds. One of the women started singing, "Here Comes the Sun." I have done it myself on occasion. We need sunshine and it certainly can buoy our spirit. It can brighten our day in more ways than one.

It is very common in pagan religions to have a Sun God. That is not too hard to understand. As the Teacher has explained and we see everyday for ourselves, you can rely on the sun. It rises and it sets...every single day. Without the sun we would not have any crops. We would not have any warmth. We would not have any light. We would not have life.

Unfortunately, too many have displaced the Son of God with sun gods. While we know that the Ten Commandments start with a prohibition about not having any other gods before the God of All, there is a specific prohibition against sun worship.

Deuteronomy 4:19 (NIV84)

¹⁹And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.

CONCLUSION:

In Matthew 17:2 and in Revelation 1:16 and 10:1 the face of Jesus is compared to the shining sun. The sun is only used to give us an image of the brilliance of Jesus' face. You and I do not worship the sun, but rather, the Creator of the sun, the Son of God.

We read in Malachi 4:1–2 (NIV84) *The Day of the Lord*

4 “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.² But for you who revere my name, **the sun of righteousness** will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

“The One described as the “sun of righteousness” can be no other than Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord is called “the LORD your righteousness” in [Jeremiah 23:6](#). And the coming of the Messiah is

pictured as a sunrise in several passages. "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" ([Isaiah 60:1](#))."

Aside from the Lord Jesus, there is no meaning in this life. Then all would be vanity. You and I are not limited by what is under the sun – S...U...N. Instead we are empowered by the Son – S...O...N – the Lord Jesus.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.