

# “I am Content”

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14

“Vanity of vanities!” says the Preacher. “All is vanity.” Basically, he says! “Everything is meaningless. Utterly meaningless.” In these words from Ecclesiastes, Solomon offers both a lament of his own actions and gives his readers a warning not to do likewise.

In the world’s view, King Solomon was a great king. He had wealth and prestige that far surpassed all the other kings of the world. People came from long distances, offering gifts, wanting to sit in the audience of the king and listen to the wisdom of Solomon. During the reign of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel achieved its greatest glory. First Kings chapter 10 records that King Solomon “made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones.” People used gold eating utensils because silver ones seemed cheap and ordinary.

During his lifetime, Solomon had heaped up great wealth. The people of Israel had heaped up great wealth under his wise guidance. But now in his later years, Solomon writes that heaping up all the wealth of the world is meaningless. It is like striving after or chasing after the wind. It always seems like it is right there, but you can’t catch it.

King Solomon was not always the devout, God-fearing king that we read about in our Sunday School lessons. For a time in his life, Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord. He had married 700 wives of royal birth from other countries – but that wasn’t the problem. (It was a problem, just not *the* problem.) *The* problem was

that not only did Solomon allow his wives to worship their foreign gods, but he set up shrines and altars for them, and he even worshiped at these shrines with them.

Solomon was not fully devoted to the Lord and Scripture tells us that he worshiped other gods including the goddess Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess, who was supposed to bless her worshipers with fertile soil and with fertile wives, so that her worshipers would be wealthy and have many children. Essentially, Solomon gave credit for his many blessings to someone other than God. We do the same thing, but instead of setting up a shrine to a Mesopotamian deity, we only need to set up a mirror to properly worship the one to whom we give credit for our successes, or perhaps more accurately, as Luther says in the Large Catechism, “To whatever you give your heart and entrust your being, that, I say, is really your god.” And as Luther goes on to say, “Mammon (that is, money and property) is the world’s most favorite idol.”

It is in Solomon’s latter days, as he reflects on his life, that he sees that he had become the poster child of the worshiper of Mammon. Heaping up wealth is where he focused his energies, rather than acknowledging and enjoying the blessings that God had bestowed upon him.

Solomon laments because he sees that all of the work of his life was meaningless because he had not devoted himself to the Lord. When he wrote these words, Solomon was the wealthiest man on earth, but he found no satisfaction in his work. Solomon once again shows his great wisdom when he realizes that all the money in the world will not satisfy the sinful nature.

Our text says, “For to the one who pleases him, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy.” These are things that an unbeliever can never truly know. It is a gift from God that you are content with the things that you have. Our sinful self says, “I am content. But I would be more content if I had ‘this’”.

Now wealth and title and influence in this world are not evil or sinful in and of

themselves. They are blessings from God, and God has given them to you. It is only when our mind becomes burdened with attaining them that there is a problem. When striving for them is placed over and above that which is truly important, then we have a problem. Compared to the things of God, wealth and power are vanity -- they are meaningless.

The wealth that we store up during our lifetime will only get passed on to someone else, with the government taking its portion. But it is all vanity. The only thing that has meaning for us in this life here on earth is the one thing that is eternal – God’s Word. Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.”

The written Word, the spoken Word, the Word joined with water, the Word made flesh on this altar: Christ’s body and blood. This is where we celebrate Christ’s great feast of victory (and we don’t need gold utensils to fully enjoy it). This is where we receive the complete forgiveness for our sins, and the promise of eternal life and salvation that is only found in Christ’s broken body and shed blood.

Our value, our worth is only found in the value of our faith, and in our relationship with Christ who gave up everything (who gave up His life) so that you and I could have true wisdom and knowledge and joy. The people of this world put a high value on things such as wealth, fame, physical appearance, or athletic ability. Look at what is praised and honored in television and in the magazines. These things are vanity (there is even a magazine with that title); they are meaningless. A person’s self-worth is not measured by the size of their bank account, by the number of people who follow them on Instagram, or by some physical stature which they think they have.

A person is only wealthy; a person is only beautiful if they possess wealth and beauty in God’s eyes. Faith in God is the only thing of value that we will ever possess during our lifetime. Yet some people treat it as if it were nothing and

deny themselves any enjoyment that comes with the contentment of knowing that we are blessed by God's goodness.

Our society speaks of a beauty that can only be known by looking into the pagan altar of the bathroom mirror. But as we have spoken in the Gradual today and throughout this Pentecost season so far, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news." If you bring the good news of salvation, even your feet are beautiful. Your stinky feet covered in the dust and dirt of the roads you traveled to bring that good news are beautiful in the eyes of God. How much more beautiful is the rest of you in His sight.

People chase after the meaningless things that bring no joy and have no value because they are not blessed by God. But you have been blessed. Our health, our family, our worldly possessions: these are all blessings from God, yet they will not last. And these would all be utterly meaningless if it were not for that greatest blessing that God has given us: faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

We come before the Lord's Table this day and partake of His greatest gift: His life giving body and blood. We offer to God our repentant hearts, and He in turn remembers our sin no more. The greatness of God's forgiveness makes us truly wealthy and makes everything else in our life vanity – a striving after the wind.

We thank God for His great goodness, and mercy, and patience, and compassion that He has shown toward us. We thank God, that because of our relationship with Him, our lives are not vanity. He has given each of us the most valuable thing in this world; He has given us something that no amount of money can buy: He has given us forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Because of the priceless treasure of Jesus Christ, we are truly wealthy, and we have every reason to say, "I am content." Amen.