

**Sunday 4th Aug. 2019 Walking on clouds?
Ecclesiastes 1 & 2 Luke 12:13-21**

Intro

Author probably Solomon

He had everything - wisdom power riches honour reputation God's favour

In Ecclesiastes the author is trying to direct people away from confidence in things to confidence in God

He is saying that only pursuit of God brings lasting and real satisfaction

Hevel

Vanity of vanities... All is vanity...the second verse of the book.

If this were a novel I was reading I may not go much further! It can sound a depressing start!

Word 'vanity' appears 9 times in our reading and 38 times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes

Hebrew word used is 'Hevel' which is sometimes translated as meaningless but actually means something more akin to breath or vapour or smoke

Like when you breath out on a cold, frosty morning and you can see your breath

Of like when you are up in a plane above the clouds and you feel sure you could step out and walk on the clouds. Don't try it!!!! The clouds are not solid and you will FAAAALLLL

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity

Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!

Hevel! Hevel! everything is utterly Hevel!

Hevel! Hevel! everything is temporary / fleeting / like smoke!

Hevel! Hevel! everything is an enigma! It may appear solid but it is vapour. It has no substance!

I think the book of Ecclesiastes has much to say to our society today

All human accomplishment will one day be superseded and/or disappear

50 years ago Neil Armstrong & Buzz Aldrin landed Apollo 11 on the moon and became the first people to walk on the moon

It was an unbelievable achievement at the time. I can remember being allowed to sit up and watch it on TV... Back & White TV!!!!

Now, 50 years later we are journeying to Mars and discovering new planets and moons and solar systems that 50 years ago were the talk of Sci fi movies... never thinking they would become reality

Armstrong & Aldrin's accomplishments... HUGE as they were, have been superseded.

On a far more trivial level... do you know the feeling of having washed your car (or had it washed for you). It is all gleaming and shiny and smells good. Then you park it on your drive and just a few short hours later it has become the bombing target for the largest pigeons you can imagine... which have just digested the largest blackberries you have seen!!

Or you spend precious time sweeping the drive and passageway. Only to get up the next morning and see it covered in leaves and twigs and muck once again

Hevel Hevel everything is Hevel!

Hevel Hevel everything is fleeting

The writer of Ecclesiastes is not just talking about these monumental achievements. Or these relatively trivial tasks. But about most of what we have come to value so much in our day to day lives.

The book of Ecclesiastes is only 12 chapters long. Have a read of it sometime.

It can seem very depressing... but actually the writer is warning us against basing our hopes and dreams and energy on things that will let us down, things that will evaporate, things that may appear to be good and solid instead but will fade, instead of seeking lasting satisfaction and wisdom in God.

In the few verses that we have read this morning we are warned that

- all human accomplishment will one day disappear
- that we can toil and labour and then die before we can enjoy the fruits of our labour
- we may leave something of our achievements to others but will they have the wisdom to use / enjoy them wisely?
- we can work hard by day but then worry all night

Hevel Hevel everything is Hevel

Hevel Hevel everything is vapour

Luke 12

Things like Wealth Career Status Pleasure

You can't take any of them with you because time will gradually - or suddenly - erase it all

Jesus was teaching the same thing in our Gospel reading today

He is warning the man in the crowd to be on his guard with respect to greed

Jesus is saying to him that life is not about possessions because they won't ultimately satisfy us and, in addition, we don't actually know how long we shall have to enjoy them

Because time or death will separate us from them

Hevel Hevel everything is Hevel

Hevel Hevel everything is temporary

The entire book of Ecclesiastes was written to teach us that although we may enjoy many good things, and none of these are wrong in and of themselves...

we may be very successful in our work and earn good money,

we may invest in friendships and have great times with our friends,

we make work out at the gym and eat a healthy diet,

we may work hard and develop a good career

But actually all these things are Hevel

They will one day disappear like vapour and instead of our lives being solid and secure, it will be like stepping out of the aircraft onto the clouds.

Life is unpredictable and time will eventually erase you and me from this earthly life

We cannot guarantee everything and there are many things that are far outside our control

So How do we live life after reading and thinking about these words without feeling totally depressed and give up????

How do we respond to the CONSTANT pressure to buy / or have more or bigger or better?

The persuasive power of advertising is colossal

update your phone phone

upgrade your car

The expectations of our society are strong

move up the career ladder

change your relationship

Asda - Save money. Live better

B&Q - Everything you need to transform your garden. You can do it when you B&Q it!

Boots - It's not just how it makes you look. It's how it makes you feel. Discover the best of new beauty at Boots

But even chocolate bars! They are constantly changing them and adding to their range!

Cadbury Dairy Milk.... always being tampered with / improved? / added to

Big test triple chocolate Jelly Popping Candy Darkmilk Original with Crunchie bits
with Daim Bar Whole Nut Caramel

I could go on...

Hopefully you get my point

We live in a society that is ALWAYS pushing new or more or bigger or smaller with the subtext that it is better

But

Hevel Hevel everything is Hevel

So how do we respond? What is the answer that the writer of Ecclesiastes gives, after targeting all the ways we try to find meaning and purpose in life, after saying that wisdom is an hevel, an enigma too.

Well - you will be pleased to know that he doesn't diss all of the above. He doesn't say give up on even the good things.

He does say though, that our motive, our reason for living is the critical thing.

He declares that adopting TOTAL TRUST in God is the only thing that will bring ultimate and everlasting joy and satisfaction

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (12:13-14)

Endless toil will often lead to grief

Serving God will lead to everlasting joy

Time will eventually erase you and me and all we care about

But The Kingdom of God is for eternity

We may or may not be rich materially But how rich are we according to God's values?

Use what we have been given for God's Kingdom and think beyond earthly goals.

At the end of the day it is only our loving, gracious, generous God who can give us real joy and ultimate satisfaction.

To finish with...

A friend of mine has been having a tough few months. Tough being an understatement.

Her health, her job, her relationships have all taken a huge battering and there have been days and days where everything has seemed meaningless. Literally.

Hevel Hevel everything is Hevel

But just a few days ago she said to me - its OK. God has got it. He is sovereign.
I trust Him He will bring good out of all of this...and even if He doesn't, I trust Him

And she chooses to believe that. She knows that... in her knower.
She chooses to invest her time in Him through prayer and worship and reading scripture
She fears God and seeks to keep his commandments - the greatest of which is to love God
And although things are still tough and she still has sad days, she has a peace and a joy and a
confidence that in and through God all is and all will be well.

Remember those beautiful white clouds, seen from the safety of the aircraft.
Tempting as they are... don't step out on to them for they are Hevel, they will not sustain you, they
will let you down.
Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Col 3:2