

Message Twelve

**Vanity of Vanities, the Reality in Jesus,
and the Revelation of the Sons of God**

Scripture Reading: Eccl. 1:2-11, 14; 2:17, 22; 3:11; 12:8; Psa. 39:4-6;
Eph. 4:17-21, 24; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 8:19-22

I. “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity”—Eccl. 1:2b:

- A. In Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 we see that the theme of this book is vanity of vanities:
 - 1. The central thought of Ecclesiastes is the vanity of vanities of human life under the sun in its falling away from God—v. 2.
 - 2. The contents of Ecclesiastes are a description of the human life of fallen mankind under the sun, a life in the corrupted world—Eph. 2:12.
 - 3. The teachings of Solomon in Ecclesiastes show that the human life in the corrupted world is a vanity, a chasing after wind—1:14.
 - 4. According to Ecclesiastes, human history, from its beginning to the present, is vanity—12:8.
 - 5. No matter how good, excellent, marvelous, and wonderful a thing may be, as long as it is of the old creation, it is part of the vanity of vanities under the sun—1:9; 2:11, 17, 22.
 - 6. Only the new creation, which is in the heavens and not “under the sun” (1:9), is not vanity but is reality—2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:24.
- B. In Psalm 39:4-6 David realized the nothingness and vanity of his life:
 - 1. In this psalm David was brought by God to realize that he was nothing and vanity; he learned that every man at his best is altogether vanity—v. 5.
 - 2. Our realizing that our condition is sinful (Psa. 38) and that our situation is one of vanity opens the way for Christ to crucify us and enter into us to replace us by living Himself through us and causing us to live together with Him in an organic union, as expressed by Paul in Galatians 2:20.
- C. Man was created by God with the highest and most noble purpose, that is, to express God in His image with His divine life and nature—Gen. 1:26:
 - 1. God’s enemy, Satan, the devil, came in to inject himself as sin into the man created by God for His purpose—3:1-6; Rom. 5:18; 3:23; 1 John 3:4.
 - 2. Through this fall of man, man and all the created things that had been committed by God to his dominion were made subject to vanity (Rom. 8:20-21); thus, human life in the corrupted world also became vanity.
 - 3. The way for us to escape this vanity is to come back to God and take God in Christ as redemption, life, wealth, enjoyment, pleasure, and satisfaction so that we may still be used by God to fulfill His original purpose in creating man for the fulfillment of His eternal economy—Eccl. 12:13-14.
- D. Although the human life in the corrupted world is a vanity, a chasing after wind, we need to realize that God has put eternity in man’s heart—3:11:
 - 1. “Eternity” in Ecclesiastes 3:11 is “a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy” (The Amplified Bible).

2. God created man in His image and formed in him a spirit so that man may receive and contain Him and have a heart that seeks God Himself so that God can be man's satisfaction—Gen. 1:26; 2:7; Zech. 12:1.
3. Although man fell away from God, and sin through Satan came in to frustrate man from receiving God for his satisfaction, the desire for God, the seeking for God, still remains in man's heart—Eccl. 3:11.
4. Temporal things can never satisfy man; only the eternal God, who is Christ, can satisfy the deep sense of purpose in man's heart—cf. 2 Cor. 4:18.

II. In Ephesians 4:17-21 and 24 Paul presents the reality in Jesus for a walk that is no longer in the vanity of the mind:

- A. In Ephesians 4:17 Paul exhorts the believers to “no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk in the vanity of their mind”:
 1. The basic element in the daily life of fallen mankind is the vanity of the mind.
 2. The Gentiles, the nations, are the fallen people, who have become vain in their reasonings—Rom. 1:21:
 - a. They walk without God in the vanity of their mind and are controlled and directed by their vain thoughts.
 - b. In the eyes of God and of the apostle Paul, whatever the people in the world think, say, and do is nothing but vanity.
 3. The nations who walk in the vanity of the mind are darkened in their understanding because of the hardness of their heart—Eph. 4:18:
 - a. When the mind of fallen people is filled with vanity, their understanding is darkened in the things of God—Psa. 94:11.
 - b. The hardness of fallen man's heart is the source of the darkness in his understanding and the vanity of his mind—Eph. 4:17-18.
- B. In Ephesians 4:17 and 21 there is a contrast between the reality in Jesus and the vanity of the fallen human mind:
 1. In the godless walk of fallen man there is vanity, but in the godly life of Jesus there is reality.
 2. The reality in Jesus is “the reality” of the new man mentioned in verse 24:
 - a. The deceit (v. 22) is the personification of Satan, and the reality (v. 24) is the personification of God; the deceit is the devil, and the reality is God.
 - b. God as the reality was exhibited in the life of Jesus—v. 21.
 3. The reality in Jesus is the actual condition of the life of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels:
 - a. The human living of Jesus was according to the reality, that is, according to God Himself—Eph. 4:24.
 - b. The essence of the life of Jesus was reality; He always walked in reality.
 - c. Everything the Lord did in His human life was God expressed and therefore was reality.
 4. The life of Jesus according to reality is the pattern for the believers' life—2 John 1-2, 4; 3 John 3-4:
 - a. We need to learn Christ and be taught in Him to live a life of reality—Eph. 4:20-21; 2 John 1; John 4:23-24.

- b. As members of the Body of Christ, we should live a life of reality, as the reality is in Jesus—a life of expressing God.
- C. We can live in the reality that is in Jesus because “we are in Him who is true”—1 John 5:20:
 1. *Him who is true* refers to God becoming subjective to us, to the God who is objective becoming the true One in our life and experience.
 2. To be in the One who is true—the true One—is to be in His Son Jesus Christ, for the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is the true God—v. 20.
 3. The true One is the divine reality; to know the true One means to know the divine reality by experiencing, enjoying, and possessing this reality.

III. Because creation has been made subject to vanity, the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God “in hope that the creation itself will also be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God”—Rom. 8:19-22:

- A. As a result of Satan’s injecting himself as sin into man, man and all created things were brought into the slavery of corruption and made subject to vanity—5:12; 8:20:
 1. Because creation has been made subject to vanity and to the slavery of corruption, everything under the sun is vanity—Eccl. 1:2; 12:8.
 2. At present the creation is enslaved under the law of decay and corruption; its only hope is to be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God when the sons of God are revealed—Rom. 8:20-21.
- B. The anxious watching—watching with full concentration—of the creation “eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God”—v. 19:
 1. Revelation is an unveiling or an appearing of something previously covered or hidden—Eph. 1:17; 3:5; Gal. 1:15-16; Rev. 1:1.
 2. At the Lord’s second coming, when we will be glorified and our bodies will be fully redeemed, the veil will be lifted—Rom. 8:18.
 3. The creation, which “groans together and travails in pain together until now” (v. 22), is awaiting the revelation of the sons of God (v. 19).
 4. This revelation will be the consummation of the process of designation that we are now passing through—cf. 1:4, footnote 1.
- C. Although the entire creation is presently held in a condition of vanity and corruption, God will bring in His kingdom to deal with the present condition—Rev. 11:15:
 1. The coming kingdom will be a kingdom of the glory of God, a kingdom composed primarily of the revealed sons of God—Matt. 6:10, 13; Rom. 8:19.
 2. God’s glory goes with His kingdom and is expressed in the realm of His kingdom—Matt. 6:10, 13b; Psa. 145:11-13.
 3. God has called us to enter into His kingdom and glory—1 Thes. 2:12:
 - a. The kingdom of God is the sphere for us to worship God and enjoy God under the divine ruling with the view of entering into God’s glory—Matt. 6:13b.

- b. The kingdom is the realm for God to exercise His power so that He may express His glory—Rev. 5:10, 13.
 - c. The shining of the kingdom is for the glorification of the Father—Matt. 5:16.
4. The kingdom of God is God’s manifestation in His glory with His authority for His divine administration; hence, to enter into the kingdom of God and to enter into the expressed glory of God take place as one thing simultaneously—Heb. 2:10; Matt. 5:20; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Thes. 1:10; Rev. 21:9-11; 22:1, 5.
 5. The creation is eagerly expecting and anxiously watching for God’s kingdom to come; at the time of the revelation of the kingdom, the whole creation will be liberated, and the manifested sons of God will be delivered from vanity and “will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”—Matt. 13:43.