

Nothing New Under the Sun

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

- [0 : 00] It's good to worship with you, and it's a joy and an honor to be able to preach God's word to you this morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 1.
- We're beginning a new sermon series today in the book of Ecclesiastes, which is part of the Old Testament's wisdom literature along with Proverbs and Job. And Ecclesiastes has baffled scholars throughout the ages with its refrain that all the all is vanity.
- Again and again, the preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us all is vanity, which on the surface seems contrary, contradictory with the rest of Scripture.
- After all, 1 Corinthians 15, 58 says, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
- But Ecclesiastes teaches that all of our work and labor and toil on earth are in vain. For this reason, some people have discounted and dismissed the book of Ecclesiastes as too pessimistic and too skeptical.
- [1 : 16] And in fact, some have even discredited the book as heretical, arguing that it doesn't belong in the canon of Scripture at all. However, Ecclesiastes 7.20 is cited as Scripture in Romans 3.10, and it has been accepted as canon as the inspired and authoritative word of God from the earliest ages by both Jews and Christians.
- And so we don't have the option of ignoring it. We must wrestle with the difficult passages and make the best sense of it that we can and live in accordance with it.
- So that's what we're going to attempt to do in our series in Ecclesiastes. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, you are God and we are not. You are eternal. We are finite. You are unchanging. And we change.
- We get old and die. We want your name this morning to be exalted. We want the pride of man to be humbled.
- [2 : 28] We long to be reminded of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, our Savior. We want to be renewed in the love of the Father and filled more and more with the power of the Holy Spirit.
- So I want you to address us now from your word and do the work that only you can do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Ecclesiastes 1, 1 to 11.
- If you are able, please stand and join me for the reading of God's word. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?
- A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rises.
- [3 : 41] The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north. Around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full.

To the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness. A man cannot utter it.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done.

And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said? See, this is new. It has been already in the ages before us.

There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

[4 : 41] You may be seated. If you have read through the book of Ecclesiastes, which I hope all of you have, you will notice that it is a difficult book to grasp or to pen down.

And I think that's actually the point. The main point of Ecclesiastes is that life as we know it is a chasing after the wind, which, of course, I hope none of you have tried to do, because you can't ever grasp the wind.

It is impossible to control. You can't. That's what life is like. You can't take life into the control of your own hands. You can't grab hold of your life's circumstances and mold it to do what you want it to do.

You can't control life. You can't make something of life. It slips from your grasp when you try to do so. The elusiveness of the book mirrors the elusiveness of life that it's talking about.

Likewise, the sheer repetitiveness of the book makes a similar point. The author has some 28 favorite words and related phrases that he uses over and over and over again.

[6 : 00] And the style of his writing mirrors the subject of his writing, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. For the created world and human history repeat themselves endlessly.

The word vanity is the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes. It occurs 38 times in the book. It's a translation of the Hebrew word *hevel*, which means breath or wind.

In other words, everything under the sun is like a puff of breath. The passing wind. The wisp of smoke. The vaporizing mist.

It's a metaphor that conveys the reality that life is temporary and transient and fleeting and futile.

It's ungraspable and uncontrollable. So it says in Psalm 39, 5 to 6, Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths. My lifetime is as nothing before you.

[7 : 03] Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath. That's *hevel*. Surely a man goes about as a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil.

Man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather. This is the main theme of Ecclesiastes. And that's why we've titled our sermon series, Life is But a Breath.

The book opens with this thesis statement in verse 2. Vanity of vanities, says the preachers. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. And then it closes with the same refrain in Ecclesiastes 12 verse 8.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. In the Hebrew language, you express the superlative of something by using repetition. For example, the most holy place in the temple and in the tabernacle in Exodus 26, 33, for example, the most holy place is literally in Hebrew, the holy of holies.

So likewise, so it means most holy place. So when you say king of kings, for example, when Jesus is the king of kings, that means he's the most high king. And so when the author of Ecclesiastes says that life under the sun is vanity of vanities, he's saying that it is the most vain.

[8 : 24] Vain not in the modern sense of being conceited or self-absorbed, but in the sense of being without value, offering no gain. The Bible scholar Ian Proven translates this beautifully.

He says, The merest of breaths. The merest of breaths. Everything is a breath. Most people live in a pretend world that they imagine to be linear and logical.

They imagine that if they can put their nose to the grindstone and get that next promotion or get that next paper published, or if they can be the best helicopter parent they can be, or the best tiger mom that they can be and raise up healthy and successful children, or if they can live frugally and invest wisely and save up so that they can buy that shiny new house, or if they can woo a beautiful woman or woo a beautiful man, handsome man, and finally get married, if only then they can make a different life for themselves, then they will be satisfied.

Then they will have a lasting memorial to their name. But they won't. Because death undoes it all.

Poof. Breath. Gone. We live in a frustrating and confusing world that is cyclical and circular, and all creation is groaning under the weight of sin, as Romans 8.22 tells us.

[10 : 05] Ecclesiastes is intended to be a splash of cold water to awaken us from the stupor with this soldering reality. This is the main point of our passage this morning.

Recognizing that life under the sun is but a breath, we should put our hope not in what we do, but in what Christ has done. First, we're going to talk about how we are fleeting.

Second, we'll talk about how we are never filled. And third, we will talk about how we will be forgotten. That, in the end, my friends, we are fleeting, unfulfilled, and forgotten.

That's the good news I have for you this morning. And I'm not being sarcastic because I mean that. That is good news. If knowing that we are fleeting, unfulfilled, and forgotten on earth is depressing and discouraging to you, then you do not yet appreciate the wisdom of the book of Ecclesiastes.

But if knowing that truth, that you are fleeting and unfulfilled and forgotten, that's what you will all be, if knowing that makes you crack a smile at your own smallness, if that makes you feel the freedom of insignificance, if that makes you fear God and take God seriously, but make yourself take yourself less seriously, then you are starting to appreciate the profound wisdom of Ecclesiastes.

[11 : 39] That's what we'll be learning over the next few months in the book. Before we dive further into the text, which I'm eager to do, let's get some preliminary things out of the way. The title of Ecclesiastes comes from verse 1, The Words of the Preacher, the Son of David, King in Jerusalem.

The word preacher translates to Hebrew, which in Greek is Ecclesiastes. That's where we get the name. It means the one who gathers or the one who assembles or convenes an assembly.

The Greek word for church is ekklesia, which is related to Ecclesiastes, the gathering. Church means gathering, which is how we get the English translation for this word as preacher in the ESV.

Someone who gathers an assembly together in order to address them. And that begs the question, who is this preacher? Verse 1 gives us a clue. The words of the preacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

We know that this preacher was a descendant of David. That's what the phrase son of David means. Not that he's necessarily his biological son, though that can be true. And that he was a king in Jerusalem.

[12 : 47] But we're not given a name. So strictly speaking, the book of Ecclesiastes is anonymous. The author is anonymous. This is different from Proverbs 1.1, which tells us explicitly the Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

So we can't know for sure who it is. With that said, traditionally, both Jewish and Christian scholarship has often attributed the book to King Solomon from the 10th century BC.

The main reason for this is that there are several autobiographical hints in the book. For example, in Ecclesiastes 1.16, I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me.

And my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. The narrator of the book confirms in 12.9 that besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many Proverbs with great care.

So unsurpassed wisdom and the composition of many Proverbs are things that King Solomon is specifically associated with in Scripture. And also in chapter 2, verses 4 to 9, the preacher notes his unprecedented wealth, that he undertook great construction projects, and that he had many concubines, which also fits the description of King Solomon in 1 Kings.

[14 : 16] Some modern scholars have argued that there's no way it can be Solomon because the language, the features of the language of the Hebrew in Ecclesiastes is too late. But using linguistic evidence to establish the date of composition is very, very difficult.

And we must remember that Jewish scholars whose native tongue is Hebrew have traditionally affirmed that Solomon is the author, or at least the preacher. Moreover, even if the preacher is Solomon, we know from the text that there was a later editor involved, a redactor involved.

How do we know that? At various points of the book, the preacher is referred to in the third person. For example, in 7.27, it says, Behold, this is what I found, says the preacher, while adding one thing to another to find a scheme of things.

So even though the words of the preacher make up the bulk of Ecclesiastes, this preacher, who is most likely Solomon, is not the final author and or redactor of the book.

The preacher himself is a character in the book and distinct from the final author of the book, who remains formally anonymous. We can see this most clearly in the framing structure of Ecclesiastes.

[15 : 28] Our passage this morning, chapter 1, verses 1 to 11, and the last passage of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, verses 8 to 14, serve as brackets that frame the entire book together.

And in both of those sections, the narrator reveals himself in the text by referring to the preacher in the third person, and then summarizes and commends the words of the preacher to his audience.

So then first, there is the preacher, and then two, there is the narrator, who has put the sayings of the preacher together in the current book format. And finally, behind and above them both, there is God, the divine author, who has inspired this book of scripture.

And we see all three of those levels of composition in chapter 12, verses 8 to 12. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

The preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd, that is God.

[16 : 37] My son, beware of anything beyond these, of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. So you see all three of those authors, so to speak.

Here's the narrator addressing his son, for whom he's written this book in part. And then he references the preacher whose sayings he has collected. And then there's the one shepherd, God, who has given these words of the wise to goad us, to push us to go and to live in the right direction.

Now that we've seen the forest, let's look more closely at the trees. And the first dose of reality that Ecclesiastes gives us is that we are fleeting. Verse 3 poses the main question that the rest of this passage answers.

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? The answer to this question is nothing.

Man gains nothing by all his toil under the sun. The word translated gain here means profit, advantage.

[17 : 48] It conveys the human desire to make a profit, profit, to find yield, a surplus, to earn dividends, to have something to show for their efforts.

But because we live in a hevel world that is the merest of breaths, there is actually nothing to be gained. The phrase under the sun, which is repeated 28 times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, conveys the universality of this reality.

Is there anyone in the world that does not live under the sun? No, the answer is no. Under the sun is an expression that conveys the universality of this reality.

Some well-meaning interpreters of the Bible in the past have understood the phrase under the sun to mean life lived apart from God. A life with an earthly rather than a heavenly perspective.

They have contended that people should live with an above the sun perspective rather than an under the sun perspective. And they have asserted that the vanity that Ecclesiastes speaks of only applies to unbelievers and not to believers.

[19 : 02] The life of unbelievers is meaningless, but the life of believers is full of meaning, so they argue. But the author of Ecclesiastes never makes such distinctions. As we will see in the coming chapters, even when we live with a divine perspective and with the wisdom that God gives us, we'll see this in chapter two, there is a vanity and a futility to our toil here on earth.

Life is but a breath, not only for the existential nihilist, but for everyone who lives under the sun, Christians and non-Christians.

It's the universal reality of living in a fallen world. Let's look at the answer of verses four to seven more closely. It says in verse four, a generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

This isn't an absolute statement about the permanence of the earth. We know from other parts of scripture that the earth will in the end pass away, but it's a statement about the relative permanence of earth compared to our fleeting lives.

In 2021, Google Earth produced a video entitled Our Cities, Time-lapse in Google Earth. Have you guys seen that? Anyone seen that? Wow. Yeah.

[20 : 24] It's exactly what it sounds like. Noting that our urban population has grown by 2.3 billion people in the last 35 years, it shows a time-lapse video of several major cities developing during that time.

Satellite images. And in 1984, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, only had 325,000 people. And from the aerial perspective, the city looks mostly like an empty desert.

But the time-lapse view, the ticks through each year, like a second per year or something like that, until it reaches 2020, and the change is breathtaking.

It's a sprawling metropolis, an urban center with 3.4 million people, with all what used to be desert dotted with these thousands and thousands of gray dots.

It's amazing to look at how rapidly the cities have developed. During those 35 years, we could ask ourselves, how many millions of people have come and gone in that city?

[21 : 31] How many millions of people were born in that city? How many millions of people have died in that city? But you know the one thing that doesn't change in any of those time-lapse videos?

The Earth. It looks exactly the same. It doesn't move. How many innovations have taken place in those cities?

How much capital has been generated in those cities, but the immovable mountains and the bedrock below don't bat an eye? By contrast to the Earth, we human beings are fleeting.

It's a truism that time flies the older you get. Our lives pass before us in the blink of an eye as the Beatles song goes. Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be.

There's a shadow hanging over me. Oh, yesterday came suddenly. We naturally tend to be forward-thinking people. We live for tomorrow, knowing that tomorrow will soon be today, but we don't remember as often that today will soon become yesterday, that we'll all soon become things of yesteryear.

[22 : 46] We know theoretically that we're all going to die one day, but we tend to live functionally like we're going to live forever, like someone else is going to get cancer, but, oh, no, that's not going to be me.

I had a good friend in seminary who was one of the healthiest people that I knew. He ate this huge plate of salad before every meal, more vegetable than I'd consume any entire day, and then he ate as organic as whenever he could.

He exercised every week, almost every day, running. When he came over to my house one day and found out that kimchi is a healthy probiotic, he ate a plate full of it by himself, all by itself, without any rice.

Yeah. He's a great guy, a better man than I was, and I am. He died when he was 40 years old. Died of cancer. It was my first funeral for a friend.

If anybody deserved to live a long, healthy life, he did. It's heaven. A mere breath. Life is always beyond our grasp, and Ecclesiastes teaches us to live with the end in view, to live with our certain death in view.

[24 : 13] Contrast the brevity of your life with the longevity of the earth, the transience of your life with the relative permanence of the earth. A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

Then the preacher uses examples from nature in verses 5 to 7 to illustrate this truth. Do you see the cyclicity, the circularity of it all?

The whole creation comes and goes.

In Hebrew, this fact is emphasized all the more by the repetition of certain words. In verse 4, it says a generation goes and a generation comes. The word goes in Hebrew is the same word that is translated blows and goes in the wind blows and around goes the wind in verse 6.

The same word is translated as run and flow in all the streams run and the streams flow in verse 7. Similarly, the words comes in a generation comes in verse 4 is the same Hebrew word that is translated goes down in the sun goes down in verse 5.

[25 : 35] So then the coming and going, the coming and going of generations is mere than the coming and goings of the sun and the wind and the streams. I know some of you really like the musical Filler on the roof.

I think there's some of you who have performed it to each other and maybe have memorized the whole thing. There's a beautiful and haunting song. I won't name any names. There is a beautiful, haunting song called Sunrise Sunset in that musical that goes like this.

Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play? I don't remember growing older. When did they? When did she get to be a beauty?

When did he grow to be so tall? Wasn't it yesterday when they were small? Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly flow the days.

Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers. Blossoming even as we gaze. Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly fly the years, one season following another.

[26 : 43] That's what our life is like. Every day the sun rises, the sun sets. Every day people are born and people die.

Sunrise, sunset. A generation comes and generation goes. Some people are so desperate to hold on to their lives, to live another day, to live another year.

But our lives are like the wind which blows to the south and goes around to the north. You can't hold on to it. You can't control it. Around and around goes the wind.

Maybe you'll make it big with your business. Maybe you won't. Maybe you'll make a lot of money. Maybe you'll lose it all in a stock market crash. Maybe you'll live till 90.

Maybe today is the last day of your life. You will never know. Your life is like the wind that blows.

[27 : 37] Similarly, verse 7 says, All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full. To the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. Every day we can observe the ebb and flow of the seas.

The waves come in and then they go out. All the rain water comes down to make the streams. And then those streams all flow down to the sea. And then some of those waters evaporate until the clouds get heavy.

And then it rains again. And then the process repeats itself again and again and again. Just as the created world is cyclical, the generations are cyclical.

They come and go. Verse 7 and 8 continue this theme and teach us that we are also never filled. It says in verse 8, All things are full of weariness.

A man cannot utter it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The word filled, there is the same word that was used in verse 7, when it said all streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full.

[28 : 40] Once again, the author of Ecclesiastes is suggesting that the pattern of creation is mirror in our own lives, in the state of humanity. No matter how many streams for how many years empty into the sea, the sea is never full.

Likewise, humans are like that. And verse 8 mentions three things about human beings that are never full, that are never filled, never satisfied. First, all things are full of weariness.

A man cannot utter it. The Hebrew word that is translated things here is the same word that also means words. So there's a parallel here. The word utter in Hebrew is a verbal form of that same word that was translated things.

All words, all things, all words are full of weariness. A man cannot utter it. The weariness of all that is under the sun is such that a man cannot utter it.

He cannot adequately express it. No words suffice, no matter how many hours and how many days I stand here and preach to you, I can never finish talking about the weariness of the earth.

- [29 : 54] No matter how much one speaks about it, it's not enough. There is no end to human speech. Similarly, the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.
- There's been approximately 500,000 feature length films that have been released and way more TV shows. But will we ever get to a point where we say, well, I've seen enough.
- I won't watch anything anymore. No, there's a line at the cinema every summer, isn't there? Will there ever be an end to people ogling eye candy?
- Male or female? Will there ever be an end to tourism? Visiting national parks and monuments, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and so on?
- No, there's no end. The eye is never filled, never satisfied with seeing. Nor the ear filled with hearing.
- [30 : 57] Spotify has more than 100 million tracks on it. 100,000 tracks are added to it every single day. But people are still always looking for new music.
- Like the sea that is always being filled yet is never full. Our mouths never have enough of speaking. And our eyes never have enough of seeing. And our ears never have enough of hearing.
- We will never get to a place where we have said, I've said enough, I've seen enough, I've heard enough, in order to remedy the weariness of all our toil here on earth.
- This is why it is foolish to try to fill and satisfy ourselves here on earth. To seek fulfillment here under the sun.
- John D. Rockefeller was the richest man in the world in the 1900s. He was once asked by a reporter, how much money is enough money? To which he famously replied, some of you know, just a little more.
- [32 : 04] Tom Brady, who was formerly the quarterback of the New England Patriots, is considered the greatest quarterback of all time.
- In 2005, Tom Brady was interviewed by the TV show 60 Minutes, where he reflected on his success so far, saying, why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think that there is something greater out there for me?
- I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, hey man, this is what it is. I've reached my goal, my dreams. But it's got to be more than this. This can't be what it's all cracked up to be.
- I mean, I've done it. What else is there for me? And the interviewer asked him, so what is the answer to that question? And he says, well, I wish I knew. And then later in the interview, when he was asked by the same interviewer, which of your Super Bowl rings is your favorite?
- Which one do you like the best? He had three at that point. His answer was revealing. The next one. The next one's the best. We are never satisfied.
- [33 : 17] Tom Brady retired with seven Super Bowl rings, saying that he wants to spend more time with his family. His wife, Gisele Bundchen, was pleading with him to have more time with his family.
- So he retired with seven Super Bowl rings. And then he came back out of retirement to play again. Because he still wanted that next ring.
- And then his wife divorced him. We are never filled. What are you trying to fill your life with?
- What are you seeking to be fulfilled by here under the sun? Remember that we are a bucket without a bottom. We will never be filled.
- So it is futile to try to fill ourselves. As fourth century African pastor Augustine says to God in his confessions, thou movest us to delight in praising thee.

[34 : 25] For thou hast formed us for thyself. And our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in God.

Because God has formed us for himself. What are the things in life that you're seeking to be filled and satisfied by? Is it relationships? Is it success? Is it respect?

Is it fame? Is it wealth? Is it sex? Is it affection? God says in Jeremiah 2.13, My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken sisters that can hold no water.

Life under the sun can never fill up. It was never intended to. There is a third humbling truth that we find in this passage, and that is this.

We will be forgotten. He says in verses 9 and 10, What has been is what will be. And what has been done is what will be done.

[35 : 32] And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, See, this is new? It has been already in the ages before us. This is one of the most famous lines from the book.

I'm sure you've heard it before. There is nothing new under the sun. What has been is what will be, and what has been will be again. When the astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first person ever to walk on the moon in 1969, he remarked, That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.

But was it? Was that really groundbreaking? Was that really new? No, something like that has happened many times before. When Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas in the 16th century, connected Europe to the Americas, when Zhang He, the Chinese admiral and explorer, traveled to Brunei, Java, Thailand, Southeast Asia, India, and Horn of Africa and Arabia in the 15th century, when the Venetian merchant Marco Polo traveled through Asia along the Silk Road in the 13th century.

It's already been done. And what has been done is what will be done again. Do you think that now that we have put a man on the moon that we're done?

No. Next is Mars. What's after that? Maybe the next planet. If the technology is advanced and we could travel faster than light, who knows? You could explore the entire Milky Way and the human beings will still not be done because there will be two trillion other galaxies still left to explore.

[37 : 12] What has been done is what will be done. And there's nothing new under the sun. Is there anything in the world of which we can truly say this is new? This will interrupt the cyclicity and circularity of life?

No, there is no such thing. Is anything really new in an absolute sense before Albert Einstein developed the proposed general theory of relativity, explained how gravity is connected to space-time in the 20th century.

Before him, there was Isaac Newton, who explained the physics of gravity and motion in the 17th century. And before Newton, there was Galileo, who discovered the principle of inertia and figured out how to calculate acceleration of objects by gravity.

Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin in 1928 is estimated to have saved 200 to 500 million lives over the last 100 years.

A study published in The Lancet in 2024 estimates that vaccinations throughout the world have saved 154 million lives over the past 50 years. We now have imaging technologies like x-rays and ultrasound, CT scans and MRI scans.

[38 : 21] We even have gene editing technologies like CRISPR. But the 2019 to 2020 average lifespan is still 72.6 to 73.2, which is exactly what Psalm 90.10 said 3,000 years ago.

The years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength, 80. What's really new? Sure, we can travel through the sky on planes nowadays, which has radically changed the way we travel.

But is that really all that different from the invention of the internal combustion engine and the rise of locomotives and the automobiles? Is that really more revolutionary than the invention of the wheel and the invention of ships in the fourth millennium BC?

All the same, we still live on the same old earth that human beings have lived on since the beginning of creation. It's hevel.

Mere breath. Are you infatuated with novelty? Are you always looking for the next big thing? Do you think something new, a new job, a new invention, a new technology, a new house, a new car, a new phone, a new robot, or new boyfriend, a new girlfriend, will finally satisfy you and make your life all that is cracked up to be?

[39 : 52] The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis is an imagined series of letters between two demons, the senior demon, Screwtape, and the junior demon, Wormwood, who happens to be his nephew.

And this is the counsel that Screwtape gives Wormwood on getting Christians to turn away from God. The horror of the same old thing is one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heart.

An endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship, driven by the drive for the new thing.

Dovelty always brings diminishing returns.

That new thing, that next thing, is not going to satisfy you. Verse 11 continues the thought, there is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

[40 : 55] Being forgotten is a disheartening prospect for all humans, but being forgotten is an especially disturbing idea for the biblical imagination.

Your memory of being wiped off the face of the earth is considered the ultimate curse in Scripture. So speaking of tyrants that God has delivered his people from, Isaiah 26, 14 says this, they are dead, they will not live, they are shades, they will not arise.

To that end, you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them. But being forgotten is the ultimate lot of all those who live in the fallen world, Christians and non-Christians.

Maybe some of you have been watching the Paris Olympics this past week. Have you guys been watching that? Yeah. A few more people than the Google Earth video.

Surely everyone knows who Simone Biles is, the Olympic gold medal winning gymnast. Everyone knows her now. But will people know who she is 50 years from now?

[42 : 10] Do you know who Olga Corbett is? No, you don't. Yeah. Do you know who Nadia Comaneci is?

Who Larissa Latinina is? Who Vera Kaslavaska is? I don't know who they were either. These are all female gymnasts who dominated the Olympics for decades, 50 to 60 years ago.

And not a single one of you know. Even the most well-known, the most famous people throughout history are not known today like they were known in their own days.

There is no remembrance of former things. Nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after. Maybe you're consumed with leaving a lasting legacy, with making a difference in the world.

Maybe you want to break new ground in your research. But there is nothing new under the sun. I could assure you from the authority of Scripture that you will not break new ground, but what is certain that you will be buried in the ground.

[43 : 20] that you will be buried in your life. That's the humbling wisdom of Ecclesiastes. We jostle with one another to get ahead of one another.

We compete against each other for scarce resources and opportunities in the rat race of life, not realizing that we're all on a hamster wheel. What's the hurry?

But here's why this is good news. Here's the difference it makes in the way we live. If we know that we're on a hamster wheel, if we know that this fallen world is cyclical, that we're not going to run ourselves haggard and work our fingers down to the bone in order to achieve something or find significance under the sun because we're not going to find that here.

And knowing this gives us the presence of mind and a sense of humor to enjoy the ride. Does that mean we don't work hard anymore?

Not at all. We work very hard, but not for the sake of our gain. Not for the sake of profit. Not for some dividends or some guaranteed outcome here on earth.

[44 : 56] Not so that we can be filled and satisfied under the sun. Not in order to leave a lasting legacy to our name. No, we work hard for the sake of faithfulness to God because it pleases Him.

Our righteous toil, even in this futile and disappointing world, is pleasing to Him, brings glory to Him. That's why we work hard. Recognizing that life under the sun is but a breath enables us to put our hope not in what we do, but in what Christ has done.

The most important thing about us is not what we have done or are doing or will do. It's what Christ has already done for us.

That's where we find our identity and significance. It's at the cross of Jesus Christ that we learn that we are simultaneously more sinful than we have ever feared, but also more loved and cherished than we had ever dared to hope.

Brothers and sisters, we don't create anything ever that is truly new in this world because there's only one person who makes something new and that's Jesus. It says in 2 Corinthians 5, 14-17, Christ has died for all, therefore all have died and He died for all that those who live might, and He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.

[46 : 38] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. The sinful world is, this fallen world is hevel.

It's the merest of breaths. But Jesus came to redeem His children and indeed to redeem the whole creation which has been subjected to futility and is stifled by its bondage to corruption by dying on the cross for our sins and being raised from the dead as the first fruits of the resurrection life.

Jesus makes us something that is truly new. And Jesus promises in Revelation 21 verse 5, Behold, I am making all things new.

The new heaven and a new earth are coming. And that's why human history, although it is cyclical, it's not an endless cycle. It's not viciously cyclical.

There is a direction. It's like a conical spiral which gets closer and closer and closer and closer to that climactic point. And if we truly get this, then we can make peace with the futility and the vanity of life.

[48 : 01] We can have tranquility in a world that is but a breath. We can heed the words of the 18th century German pastor Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, which I'm sure you guys have forgotten.

He once said, Preach the gospel, die, be forgotten. Preach the gospel, die, be forgotten.
Heavenly Father, help us to do that. Help us to remember you so that we don't live to be remembered here under the sun.

give us the wisdom, the humility enjoined to us in this book so that we know how to laugh at ourselves and the futility of life and still live faithfully with joy.

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.