

24-10-09- From Vanity to Purpose

Last night I watched comedian Jeff Allen on YouTube. I don't usually watch comedians, but I recognized his voice from years ago when I listened to the comedy channel on Sirius/XM, so I wanted to hear what he had to say. He started out talking about how he met his wife and had his first child.

Not long after his first child was born, he came to a crisis point in his life and told his wife that she had to take him to Alcoholics Anonymous, because he wouldn't go himself. She took him, and the first thing he heard was that you have to pray. He asked: 'to what?' because he was an atheist. They told him to find something in the universe bigger than himself.

Even though he quit drinking, he was still in crisis for the next eight years. He kept looking for answers and couldn't find them. He was spiraling downward, and now we'll listen to the last 6 ½ minutes of the video.

Ecc 1:1-3 ¶ The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. **2** Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity. **3** What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

The epiphany that Jeff had when he heard Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 is the epiphany that we all have to have when it comes to practical living. This is that conclusion:

What does that mean for us as we try to live our life? It basically means that we have to live our life with the ultimate goal of our eternal life. Let's look at that.

Job was the first book chronologically written in the scripture. Job lived before Moses. He was the son of Issachar, one of Jacob's sons.

Jas 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of **the patience of Job**, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

I have read through Job many, many times, and it certainly doesn't seem like Job was a very patient man. We all know the story: God tells Satan that Job is an upright man – one who fears God and eschews evil. Satan says: 'Let me at him and he'll curse you.' So Satan takes Job's wealth, his children, and finally his health. Job's wife, which was left to him – see that, ladies? – tells him to curse God and die.

So finally, as Job sits out in the dirt and picks his sores, he gets four visitors. Three of them advise Job in different manners to admit his sin to God and ask forgiveness and God will bless him again. Job continually defends himself against those charges that he has committed any grievous sins.

Job isn't gracious in his defense.

Job 12:1-3 ¶ And Job answered and said, **2** No doubt but ye *are* the people, and wisdom shall die with you. **3** But I have understanding as well as you; I *am* not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?

Job 16:1-5 ¶ Then Job answered and said, **2** I have heard many such things: miserable comforters *are* ye all. **3** Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? **4** I also could speak as ye *do*: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. **5** *But* I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage *your grief*.

Job 19:1-3 ¶ Then Job answered and said, **2** How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? **3** These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed *that* ye make yourselves strange to me.

So it's pretty plain that Job wasn't rejoicing in his infirmities. When you read through the book, you see that Job was miserable and he showed it. But there is one thing that Job had – one assurance – that his so-called friends could not take away from him.

Look back to the Job 18, and see what he was defending himself against:

Job 18:1-4 ¶ Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, **2** How long *will it be ere* ye make an end of words? mark, and afterwards we will speak. **3** Wherefore are we counted as beasts, *and* reputed vile in your sight? **4** He tearth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?

Bildad says that Job is tearing himself apart in his anger. He then asks if the earth should be forsaken and the rock moved out of its' place for Job. That is a rhetorical question that is basically saying: "Should the way God works change just for you Job?"

He then goes on to tell Job exactly what he thinks of him:

Job 18:5-8 ¶ Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. **6** The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. **7** The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. **8** For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare.

And on and on until the end of the chapter:

Job 18:21 Surely such *are* the dwellings of the wicked, and this *is* the place *of him that* knoweth not God.

He's telling Job that he doesn't even know God. That Job is wicked and his end will be destruction.

But when Job replies to this, look at what Job knows for sure and none of these miserable comforters can take from him:

Job 19:23-27 ¶ Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! **24** That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! **25** For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth: **26** And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God: **27** Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; *though* my reins be consumed within me.

The one thing that Job is banking on – the one thing he knows deep down in his heart – is that this body that he is suffering in is going to be destroyed, but he is going to see God in his flesh.

Job has a blessed hope. He is looking toward something that he knows isn't going to happen in his lifetime. He is by faith looking for his resurrection body. That is the patience of Job.

When we look at David, he was a man after God's own heart.

1Ki 11:4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, **as was the heart of David his father.**

We know that David was an adulterer, a murderer, was disobedient in numbering Israel, but his heart was perfect. That means despite the sins that he committed; his heart was stayed on the LORD.

How did David manage to keep a perfect heart before the Lord?

Ps 17:15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

First, he always had his blessed hope in mind.

Ps 39:1-3 ¶ I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. **2** I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, *even* from good; and my sorrow was stirred. **3** My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: *then* spake I with my tongue,

If we look at this passage in its' practical application, we see in the first three verses that David had trained himself to keep silence when the wicked was before him. Rather than blurting out nasty things and opposing them, even from saying good and righteous things to them, he kept silence. The sorrow came from not speaking good things, but by keeping silent he keeps himself from saying something he will regret.

Even so, he gets angry – his heart is hot and the fire burns within him. But now when he does speak, it isn't to the wicked, it is to God.

Ps 39:4-6 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it *is*; *that* I may know how frail I *am*. **5** Behold, thou hast made my days *as* an handbreadth; and mine age *is* as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state *is* altogether vanity. Selah. **6** Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up *riches*, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

It goes back to Ecclesiastes 1. He has to humble himself before the Lord and recognize that vanity is the best that any man can achieve apart from God. He has to put down his pride and look to God to escape his vanity.

Ps 39:7 ¶ And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope *is* in thee.

Notice the two words in that verse – wait and hope.

Rom 8:25 But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Paul wasn't giving any groundbreaking new information when he wrote those words to the Romans. David had essentially said the same thing.

So when we get to Paul, and his instructions for us today on how we should escape our sin nature and make our hearts perfect before God, he takes us again right back to Ecclesiastes 1.

Rom 8:20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope,

There you have it again: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity sayeth the preacher. But while Solomon was looking only at things which were under the sun, Job, David and Paul add hope. All is vanity without hope.

We can live our lives not in the vanity of hopelessness. We can have a purpose in our life and that purpose is hope – the earnest expectation of seeing our faith become reality.

Rom 8:21-25 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. **23** And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body. **24** For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? **25** But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Now we have seen already in previous lessons that the salvation being spoken of here is not eternal soul salvation. It is essentially salvation from being subjected to vanity. We can be saved from the vanity of existence by the earnest expectation of the redemption of our body.

In other words, we don't have to live a vain life if we live our lives in the hope of our redeemed bodies and our eternal life in the heavens.

2Cor 5:1-4 ¶ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: **3** If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. **4** For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Again here we see the groaning and travailing that we are going through, but again we see that blessed hope and the redemption of our bodies.

Speaking of groaning, looking at our heavenly hope is also how we learn to glory in tribulations.

2Cor 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. **8** For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. **9** And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will **I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake:** for when I am weak, then am I strong.

A lot of people misread this passage and the one in Romans 5 about glorying in tribulations. Notice Paul doesn't say glory because of my infirmities and so on. He says glory in them. It doesn't mean you have to be grateful that you are going through infirmities, reproaches, distresses and so on, it means that you will glory in them.

But if you don't know how to glory in the Lord when you aren't in these bad situations, it will be incredibly difficult to learn how to glory in the Lord whenever you come into these hard times.

When you read through the Psalms that David wrote, some are Psalms that are asking for forgiveness and deliverance, but there were always praises and exclamations of trust throughout all of the dark times. But there are other Psalms of David that are just purely praise and trust in the Lord. David was able to maintain his praise and trust in the Lord through the dark times because he perfected it in the good times.

So now finally, how does one escape the vanity of a sinful life without putting oneself back under the law or some artificial set of rules and regulations? To my mind there is one way that will work and will help us all escape the vanity that is under the sun in our flesh.

2Cor 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; **18** While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Like Tracy always says: "If you can see it, it is going away." If you can see it, it is being subjected to vanity. If your mind is looking at those things that are eternal and your eyes see something that may cause you to sin, both thoughts can't occupy your mind at the same time. You will either blind your mind to the eternal things and go with the lust of the eyes, or you will blind your eyes to the lust and go after the things of the mind.

Php 3:20-21 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: **21** Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

If the conversation in your mind is on things of God, is your conversation on earth going to be backbiting and devouring one another? If your focus is on heavenly things and eternal things, do you have to put yourself under a system of rules and regulations to keep you from sin?

It is not impossible to sin while you are thinking on the things of the Lord, but you have to mentally force those things from your mind in order for your flesh to take over.

And finally, my favorite:

Col 3:1-4 ¶ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. **2** Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. **3** For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

If you are actively seeking things that have eternal weight of glory, and your affections are on the Lord and those things which are pleasing to Him, what does it matter if someone cuts you off in traffic? What does it matter if someone does something you don't approve of? What does any of that vanity matter in light of eternal glory?

We get so wrapped up in things that are not going to matter tomorrow or in a week from now that we let it override our focus on things that will matter throughout eternity. When I am able to live in that perspective of life, I am actually a lot more fulfilled than when I have something that satisfies my flesh.

So for me, when it comes to practical living, that is the only thing that can keep me from fulfilling the lust of my eyes, the lust of my flesh, and especially – the one that gets us all – is my pride in my own abilities of my flesh.

That is the only way to have real joy and sometimes achieve some semblance of happiness.