

Vision – Radical Connections

VBC

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Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

VISION SERIES TWO

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“Emptiness Connecting with Fullness”

INTRODUCTION

In April of 1970, the Anglo-French playwright, Samuel Beckett, produced a play titled “Breath”

- It had no actors, no dialogue
- The curtains opened, and before a perplexed audience was a stage, littered with rubbish
- There was a brief cry, followed by an amplified recording of inhaled and exhaled breath
- As quickly as the lights began to illuminate - they turned dim
- Followed by another exhaled breath, the same brief cry, and the curtains closed
- That was it - it all took approximately 30 seconds

- It was Beckett’s summation of life

At first glance, it would appear the writer of Ecclesiastes writes a similar script

- His introductory words give an assessment of life akin to Beckett’s
- Verse 2 is his motto for life (read)

At the heart of the word *hebel* is the idea of something temporal, evanescent, something that vanishes, like a vapor, wind, breath (like money in my wife’s wallet)

- He will use the word some 30 times in the book

That he places the words on top of each other is his way of emphasizing the utter emptiness

- *Hebel hebelim* - vapor of vapors - the thinnest of wisps
- Life is “the ultimate in meaninglessness”
- It is here - and then - it is gone
- I run my route, see my patients, make my quotas, finish my task, preach my sermons
- And then - before I know it - it is all over - and someone replaces me
- And soon - I leave this earth - and I am quickly forgotten

Perhaps you feel something of this at times

(I know I do, being a Charger fan, this time of year, I find myself going “it’s meaninglessness!”)

It all led to the question (read vs 3)

- The term was borrowed from the commercial world to describe the bottom line

Illustration

My dad

- Independent route - doing the books every Friday night
- Will there be any profit when it is all done, when all of the receipts are turned in, when all of the expenses are taken into account?

It's a question asked repeatedly in the book

- will it matter that I was here, will my life have had SIGNIFICANCE?

Illustration

Visiting some of great cathedrals of Europe

- Noting the names of former lives buried under my feet
- Jostled by other tourists, oblivious to the uncomplaining dead under their feet
- Suddenly, it hit me - will it matter when I am gone?
- Will my life be like ants on a rock, leaving no trace of their path?

BODY

This fear, this angst, seems to have had its hold on the writer, he is...

1) BURDENED BY THE BREVITY OF MAN, 1:4a

- We come - and go - much to our disappointment
- We grow up reading the comics - and before we know it - before we are ready, we're reading the obituaries

Illustration

Western chapel

- I looked around, noticed where I and my classmates sat that first day
- It was only yesterday, no - it was 32 years ago!
- Before I know it - my library will belong to someone else
- We find that we are mere renters - there are no real owners in this world
- No one gets renewable season tickets
- And though we are the main actors on this stage - it is the stage that remains
- He is...

2) PAINED BY THE ENDLESS CYCLES OF CREATION, 1:4b

- The unending cadence of creation—that justify his pessimistic view
A -THE SUN, vs. 5
 - Like a runner, it hurries, lit. "pants," but having arrived, an exhausted sun must undertake the ordeal all over again
 - Like a Hood to Coast runner, who attempts to hand off, only to be told he/she must run the next leg, and the next... forever

- The sun is consigned to perpetual motion
- From the weary monotony of the sun, he shifts to another illustration of pointless movement

B - THE WIND, vs. 6

- It is no more effectual than the sun
- From the heavens, he notes that things on earth are even more unsettling

C - THE RIVERS, vs. 7

- Melted water meandering, rushing to the oceans
- Only to be evaporated, condensed into rain, that falls back on mountains, and rushes back into the sea

- Life is just a lot of glow, blow, flow - and it spells "no"
 - No real meaning
 - It's all "wearisome", vs. 8
 - It's all tiring; one is hard pressed to put in words

- He looks within himself and again, and finds this gnawing emptiness...

3) WEARIED BY THE DISSATISFACTION OF LIFE, vs. 8

- Like the sun, man is on a wearisome treadmill of sorts
- The eye is never FULFILLED, it constantly needs new images
- Like commercials that can't seem to create enough stimulation
- Cinematography that wants to take us more deeply into the action
- Yet the eyes say, "give us more"
- The ear always wants to hear more, it's the nature of life
- Political junkies can never get enough news, as they move from internet to network
 - CNN to Fox to Hardball

- SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT!!

4) FRUSTRATED BY THE REDUNDANCY OF LIFE, vss. 9,10

- There is a paralyzing repetition to life, a burdensome monotony, like watching Groundhog Day
- My DMin students trying to find new ideas, who can find one?
- We feel like trailblazers exploring virgin territory, only to discover the footprints of those who have gone before us
- We scale a summit, only to find discarded food wrappers
 - *Illustration:* Larch Mtn., climbing to the top only to find a parking lot

5) DISMAYED BY THE FORGOTTENNESS OF LIFE, vs. 11

- We all have this appointment with the grave, that comes so randomly
- And eventually, no matter our accomplishments, we soon become a faint memory

So what is this all about?

- Like Beckett, some cynical old man inviting us into the darker corners of his soul, only to drive us to a similar sense of despair
- As we view a world that seems to be senseless, incoherent, monotonous
- Or could it be something different?

When you read the whole of the book:

- You ask, "could it be he is pushing us to the edge of life's thinness, emptiness?"
 - Pressing us to see the vanity of life, WHEN LIFE IS LEFT TO ITSELF?
 - Life as a closed system
 - Creation where there is no consideration of Creator
 - Pressing us to see this: that life viewed strictly from ground level is not only one dimensional, IT IS FLAT
 - There is no narrative, no plot, no PURPOSE that unifies the characters, puts them in motion as part of a larger story (Horton)
- Life under the sun, and only under the sun, will not, CANNOT ultimately satisfy
 - No matter your career or position, or accumulated wealth, or power
 - It all ends up *hebel* - vanity - emptiness - meaninglessness
 - Iaccoca: "I find that cars are not really that important"

Why? The writer tells us later in the book

- God has "set eternity in the hearts of men," 3:11
 - IE man has been made with something of the eternal – something of another existence
 - To put it in the words of Genesis - man is created in the image of the divine
- And the separated heart is eternally restless, empty, until it is restored back to the God of eternity

The question is this - when people search for Him, will they find Him here?

For the sad thing is that when people in their emptiness have looked to the church to find this fullness:

- They have too often come, and left even more empty
- Finding an organization rather than a living organism

- Finding religion rather than spirituality
- Finding dead traditions rather a living God
- FINDING A CHURCH SIMPLY DISTRACTED

When we as a church stepped back to dream about our future

- We said - let's be a church where this present emptiness **CONNECTS** with fullness, with fulfillment
- Where our deepest longings for something of the Spirit are found here
- Where people can come and see something of God

WHAT WILL THIS REQUIRE?

- More than I am sure I realize

1) It means that we intentionally position ourselves to **MEET** God

- I discover in Scripture that God generally shows up where He is longed for
 - He came to Pentecost because they were all together, waiting for Him, Acts 2:1
 - He shook the place in Jerusalem and filled them with the Spirit (4:31), because they met and asked Him to speak His word, stretch His hand, and perform His wonders
- If this is to be a church where the presence of God does break in and presses in towards us, it will be because we have made it one of our strongest intentions to invite Him here

2) It means we intentionally station ourselves to **HEAR** God

- That we come to listen, for it sets the tone for everything that follows
- Wait for His voice, which comes, better come, from the pulpit
- Wherein (hopefully) a dynamic interplay occurs between its pages and our lives
- We come to hear Him speak through one another, indwelling Spirit connecting with indwelling Spirit
- In all of this, something of God invades, penetrates our souls, with words sharper than a two edged sword
- And fullness begins to replace emptiness

3) It means we intentionally position ourselves to **RESPOND** to God

- To whatever He says (this is the heart of worship)
- In whatever manner the spoken word demands
 - Be it prayer - which is the foundation of intimacy with God
 - Be it confession, repentance, adoration, gratefulness
 - Be it praise - be it music
 - Be it communing with Him at the table - symbols of His presence -where He does His own work as well

CONCLUSION

Why does all of this matter? If I am not filled with the fullness of God, how can I hope to speak to the emptiness of this world?