

The Rev. Michael J Bridge  
Sermon- Ecclesiastes 1  
Sunday, September 17, 2017

### Life is like a fading mist

1. I grew up in the 1980s and 90s. I was in high school in the 90s, graduating in 1996. Sadly, the music of my generation is what was known as grunge music.
2. For those lucky enough to *not* be familiar with grunge, it is what it sounds like. Grunge music was about a bunch of guys, usually from the Pacific-Northwest, who rarely showed, wore nothing but flannel shirts, and were pretty miserable. If you missed it, you missed very little.
  - a. However, there were some gems of the grunge scene, such as Pearl Jam's sorrowful and powerful cover of the song "Last Kiss."
3. Teens, by design (or thanks to the fall, I am not sure which), are a miserable lot. They know it all. Their parents are stupid. Everyone is telling them what to do. And *nobody* understands what they are going through. No adult has *ever* been a teen, and therefore will *never* be able to relate to the hormonal angst of life as a 16-year-old.
  - a. When you add an entire genre of music centered around being miserable to that already volatile Molotov cocktail of emotions and melodrama, it isn't pretty.
  - b. Here are the typical lyrics to a grunge song (and the typical thoughts of your average teen): Wha wha, woe is me. Wha wha, I'm so sad. Nobody understands how I feel. No one has ever felt this way before. My parents told me, "No, we won't buy you a \$40,000 sports car for your sixteenth birthday." Whoa is me. Wha wha.
  - c. If you grew up in the 90s, you know that song. (Sorry, I shouldn't have this much fun preparing a sermon.)
4. I doubt, at this point, that it takes a genius to guess which reading I am preaching on. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes was apparently both a teenager and member of a grunge band. So much of what he has to say is about the fleeting nature of life, and how, because of its fleetingness, life seems somewhat meaningless.
  - a. The Preacher sounds like he is having an existential crisis.
5. It is kind of easy to make fun, but in all seriousness, the opening to Ecclesiastes sounds like someone who is depressed, looking at life and wondering, "What the heck? Is there even a point to this?"
  - a. I don't know about you, but I have certainly had times where I have felt this way. I have had times in my life where things didn't make sense and I wondered why I had to face what I was facing. Sometimes that feeling was real and palpable. Other times it was more of an emotional fit I was having, showing that I was more influenced by grunge music than I thought.

### Putting hope in false things

1. The Preacher then goes on and talks about the vanity of wisdom. I am not going to go into his specific words on this, as it is just the first of many things that he says are vanity. His use of the word vanity seems to be that the things are fleeting, ephemeral, fade like a fine mist.
2. As the Preacher goes through his list of vanities in Ecclesiastes, there is a pattern that forms, and one that he recognizes. We can't put our hope in false things.

- a. Is wisdom really vanity- fleeting, chasing wind? Is it pointless? No, not when kept in proper perspective. When wisdom is used for good ends, good purposes, and to glorify God or serve his people, then it is a wonderful thing. When one who is wise begins to put their trust and hope in their wisdom instead of the Giver of that wisdom, it becomes vanity and chasing after wind.
  - b. The way the Preacher was relying on his “wisdom,” he was drawing conclusions that led to despair. Interestingly, his commitment to his own wisdom has made him a fool.
3. Whatever it is that we have in this world, we must keep it in proper perspective. Every good thing can be corrupted or misused. Every gift can be made into a curse. God gave us a beautiful gift of music, and now we have rap and country music. God gave us the great gift of physical love within marriage, and now 90% of the internet is a gross exploitation of that.
4. Life isn’t chasing after wind, when we focus on the right things.

### Fear the Lord and obey his commands

1. In chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher comes back to this understanding that, for life to have any meaning, it has to be a life centered on God. Without God, there is no meaning.
2. The Preacher’s conclusion is this: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
3. He was ahead of his time in this understanding. Atheists in our day keep struggling for purpose while rejecting God, the only thing that can give life purpose. What purpose can life have apart from God? Only that which we randomly assign to it. As it turns out, without God, life truly is an ephemeral breeze or mist that fades as quickly as it comes.
4. Fear God and keep his commandments. The OT usage of “fear God” doesn’t mean to cower from him, but to put appropriate faith and trust in him because we know who he is. For a Jew, the idea that one wouldn’t believe in God was absurd. But it wasn’t absurd to think that people don’t have appropriate faith and trust.
5. As I said last week, what makes us Christians is the faith and trust we place in Jesus, supplied to us as a gift from God through his Holy Spirit. And what sets us apart as Christians then is our behavior- our obedience to the commands of Christ.
  - a. This brings us right in line with what the Preacher says in Ecclesiastes. Fear God and keep his commandments. Have appropriate faith and trust, and obey. This is who we are called to be as Christians. And as the Preacher says, it is the whole duty of man.