

What Will You Be Doing in the New Year?

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[0:00] My name is Todd. I'm the pastor here at Cascade. Come on in. It's okay.

We do things a little bit differently here. If you're a first-time visitor, we preach early. That gives me an extra two hours to go at it. I'm just kidding. But what it does is at the end of the service, there's a time for questions.

If something's come up during the week that you want to have the pastor's perspective on, or just to see if you can make me look like a fool, thanks. Really appreciate that most of the time.

But we do have a time for question and answer towards the end of the service. But we do start off preaching. And just that's my disclaimer. I'm really hoping that you guys had a good Christmas.

Did anybody have a good Christmas? We had a fantastic Christmas. Quite possibly the last time my family will be together for Christmas for many years.

[1:03] I have a son that's going into the military. I have other children that are googly eyes at potential mates and stuff. It could be that our family is going six different ways.

So the kids got really creative to make it special. We broke some traditions. Instead of celebrating on Christmas, like we normally do, we celebrated on Christmas Eve so that they could go spend Christmas with whatever.

So we celebrated on Christmas Eve. So the eve of Christmas Eve, what day is that? Is it Christmas Eve Eve? Or is that just a stutter?

What? There you go. I knew there was that. I heard that. All right. Anyways, they stayed up till like 2 a.m. wrapping gifts for their parents. And they did so very quietly.

Bang! Crash! Boom! You know? So we were up. But it was wonderful. We sat down for celebrating by giving gifts. And my children handed me a piece of firewood that they had wrapped up.

[2:10] My firewood. That I'd gone into the mountains and cut and split and stacked. And I was thinking that this was like a symbol for we're going to supply you with firewood for the next year. Oh, no.

It's just, here's some wood. It was awesome. We had a great time. And I really hope that you had a wonderful celebration as well. But after Christmas comes New Year's, right?

And in our culture, New Year's is a time of reflection. Where you stop and you take a little bit of time and you look at the year that has been.

And the good and the bad. The floods, the snow, the forest fires. And you also look to the year ahead. And, you know, a lot of people will write down New Year's resolutions.

Anybody put a New Year's resolution last year to lose weight? I did. I lost 50 pounds. I found some of it back over Christmas, but I'm getting it back.

[3:12] All right? So, but I'm not going to lose 50 pounds this year. And everybody said, whatever. You know, I said, praise the Lord, because I like food. But anyways. But today, what I want to do is, I want to take the time to give you some food for thought.

I want to, this isn't going to be a salvation message. This is going to be a challenge. So if you are not a Christian today and you are in this church, you dodged a major bullet.

No, I'm just kidding. Get saved. There's nothing more important, no more important decision than you can make in this next year than to learn to trust in Jesus. But for those of us that are believers for a while, it is very frustrating when I go to click a button and nothing happens.

There it is. It is time to consider. And we're going to consider from the book of Ecclesiastes. So if you've got your Bible with you, we're going to open it up to Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

For those of you who don't know where Ecclesiastes is, open your Bible to the middle. You'll find the book of Psalms. Go to the right. You'll find the book of Proverbs. Get through Proverbs and you'll find the book of Ecclesiastes.

[4:33] If you get all the way to Song of Solomon, you know, turn back real quick because that one, you know, it's not appropriate for Sunday more than ever. But here we are. Ecclesiastes chapter 3. We're going to take a look at the first.

We're just going to start with the first eight verses. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to pluck what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn. A time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to tear.

[5:32] A time to sow. A time to keep silence. And a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

A time to keep and a time for everything under the sun. And so the question that I have for you is what are you going to be doing?

What will you do in the new year? Will you serve the Lord or will you serve yourself? So let's take a look at this.

The book of Ecclesiastes, there is one word that happens the most. It's vanity. And vanity is attempting to grasp that which cannot be grasped.

In other places it's translated chasing after the wind. But the idea here is that the preacher is going to talk about and he's going to challenge us about all of the things that we desire.

[6:32] Things like a Merry Christmas. How many times have you sought to have a Merry Christmas and it's just blown up? That's never happened in my family. Ever.

Right? Or how many times have you sought to do a really good job and receive accolades for that and it just blows up? How many times have you just tried to seek peace and it just never...

Or wealth or status or fame or... And you know what? Even when you do get a hold of it, it slips out of your fingers. Vanity, vanity.

All is vanity. And so, in fact, if you turn to chapter 1 of the book of Ecclesiastes, you'll see here verse 2.

Vanity of vanity says the preacher. All is vanity. And if you turn to the very end of the book, the last words of the preacher, guess what they're going to be? Vanity, vanity.

[7:32] All is vanity, the preacher says. So, if you look in chapter 12, verse 8, it's the preacher begins and ends with a statement of vanity.

That this life is filled with vanity. Isn't that a comforting thought? Aren't you glad that you're here today? Don't you feel motivated? Like, oh, that's just a wonderful word from the Scripture.

Well, it gets better. Right? Right? Because all is vanity, the preacher says that no one is better off than anybody else.

Turn to chapter 6, verse 8. In chapter 6, verse 8, we're going to read this. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool?

Now, if you read the Bible much, you will know that foolish people are looked down upon. The whole book of Proverbs says don't be the fool. Right? Better it is to be silent than to be a fool.

[8:36] You know? It's not good to be a fool. But what does it say here? Verse 8. What advantage has the wise man over the fool?

And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? The idea here is this. If you're poor and yet you know how to behave well in society, it doesn't matter.

If you're foolish or if you're wise, it doesn't matter. Do you know why? Oh, we'll get to that. We'll get to that. All right. So, the preacher who makes up the vast majority of this book is saying that life is vain.

It's a vanity. It just can't be grasped. He says that it begins in vanity, it ends in vanity. And because life truly is vanity, nobody is better off.

Rich, poor, wise, stupid. It just doesn't matter. Why is that? Well, we have to look at the second most common phrase spoken, under the sun.

[9:53] It's literally mentioned one last time. Just about every time vanity is mentioned, it's pointed out about life under the sun. And vanity occurs under the sun.

Stick your finger here, if you want, in Ecclesiastes. And I'm going to roll over to Romans chapter 8. I want to share a passage with you real quick, if I can find it.

Acts, Romans 8.20. It says this, The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.

That's another way of saying that we live in a fallen world. You know, because sin is in this world, things don't work the way they're supposed to.

Isn't that fun? You know, right now I'm in the midst of trying to put together a small block. Small block Chevy 350. I'm just going great.

[11:09] I've got the heads, I'm ready to put the heads on. And they don't fit. So I thought, oh, the heads are wrong. So I sent them back and I got new heads.

It ain't the heads. There's something wrong with my... So I'm banging on things. That's really not how you're supposed to put together small block engines, are you, Frank? But I'm banging on things and I'm going to make them fit eventually, by golly, by gum.

That's because there's sin in the world. The same thing goes on in our relationships. If you're married, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Because you come to the marriage altar and you remember how that felt? You looked over and you were like, dang, I'm excited. This is great. And do you remember what you guys said last Tuesday? Uh, maybe it was Wednesday. I don't know, when frustration crept in and you looked and you said, grrrr. And she barked right back at you. Yeah. I thought we came together in love and happiness.

[12:13] And yet even in that relationship where we are totally committed to one another, there's grit. There's hardness. It's not, it's not what we envisioned it to be because of sin.

Why is all of life filled with vanity? Because we live in a fallen creation. All right. What's interesting here is, in Ecclesiastes, take a look in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 14.

There's an amazing statement here. This is the preacher speaking. And he says, verse 14, I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity, a striving after the wind.

He's not Santa Claus. He doesn't see you when you're sleeping and see you when you're awake.

He doesn't know if you've been bad or good. What he's saying here is that he's observed everything that goes on.

There's nothing that goes on that he's not aware of as far as the relationships between people, business transactions, the way things grow, the way things are.

[13:32] He knows what's going on. And if you know anything about who the author of this is supposed to be, anybody? Solomon. Solomon. Pretty sharp guy or not?

God-given wisdom more than anybody else who has been or ever will be, right? Pretty brilliant guy. So when he says, I have seen everything that is done under the sun, he's aware of what's going on. More than that, turn over to chapter 3, verse 16. Moreover, I saw that under the sun, that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness.

And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. You know, this is what we expect.

We expect when we go before the judge, when we go to a place of judgment, we expect there to be righteousness and justice, and it's perverted and twisted because of sin.

Or we go over... This last year has been amazing, hearing some of the stories about what happened in holy places, in churches, in religious centers.

[14:45] It's just terrible. We go and we expect these things, and it's just not there. And that's because this is life under the sun. This is life in a broken world, filled with corruption and evil.

So take a look at chapter 8, verse 15. The preacher says, Look, man, just grin and bear it.

You're going to spend the next 40 years working. And work's tough. And when that happens, you know, hey, just grin and bear it. Eat, drink, relax, enjoy, and get back to work.

This is life under the sun. In his wisdom he saw all, and it was not good.

So tie a knot in the end of your rope and hang on, baby, because it's going to be a ride. That's pretty much what he says. Why does he say this?

[16:15] What drives his conclusion? Death. Oh, it's a lovely thing. Good morning. It's great for you to be here in church today. Let's talk about death.

Let's do it. Chapter 3. Beginning in verse 19, it says this.

For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same. As one dies, so the other.

They all have the same breath. And man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from dust, and to dust all return.

Who knows whether the spirit of man go upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth. So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot.

[17:17] Who can bring him to see what will be after him? Why is it all vanity? Why is it just chasing after the wind?

For it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that to face the judgment, it says in the book of Hebrews. Look, you can be the richest person in the world, and you can pour all of your money into medical research, and guess what's going to happen to you?

Anybody? Yeah, you're going to die. You can be the luckiest man on earth, and have somebody drop a tree on your head, and have it miss you.

I didn't die that day, but what's going to happen down the road? I'm going to die. You're going to die. All your dreams, all your hopes, all your talent, all your skill, all of the wealth that you have amassed, is going to slip out of your fingers, because death will take it from you.

For you live under the sun. And everybody's going, you know, we could have went and had a nice meal right now.

[18:33] I don't need to be thinking about this. But the preacher isn't the only one who speaks in this book. In fact, this whole book is surrounded, encompassed, it is encapsulated by the words of the author.

Turn with me, if you will, to chapter 1, verse 1. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

That's the author talking. He's saying, look, here you go, this is what the preacher said. Turn to chapter 12, the last chapter.

He says, verse 9, besides being wise, the preacher, do you see how he's distinguished himself? Now, a lot of people believe that Solomon wrote this whole book. There are a lot of people who believe that two people wrote this book. But in reality, the book doesn't have an autograph.

[19:47] Do you know what that means? That we can't be 100% certain. But there are some indicators as to who wrote it and why. Being wise, being wealthy, being rich.

It's very well that the author, or not the author, but the preacher is Solomon. And maybe the author is a scribe, or maybe the author is Solomon himself looking back on his life after he has lived.

He's drawn some conclusions, and he wants to share that with us. We don't know. But we do know that there's a little bit of a different voice. Now, I just want you to be careful about one thing.

You see, some people think that because all is vanity, we just go out and do whatever we want.

And I want to... If it doesn't matter in the end, then we can just, you know, no. So let's talk about the words of the author.

[20:49] The author uses the words of the preacher as a goad. Look here. It says, 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.

The idea is that when we read the book of Ecclesiastes, the intent is for us to get poked out of our comfort zone by thinking about things that we normally don't want to think about.

Like the fact that I became incredibly talented at doing this, and it's meaningless. Or the fact that I have invested all of my energy and my emotions and my strength in developing this, and it means nothing.

That my life is secondary because I live under the sun. It is something that these words are there to poke us and to get us past where we are and move us forward.

[22:01] Verse 14. God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

You see, above and greater than the creation is the Creator. And He will hold us accountable for all that we do.

What advantage does the person who strives to do good over the person who strives to not care? Under the sun, no advantage. Before God, vast difference.

If I make my living by stealing from people, I could be incredibly wealthy. And if I get away with it under the sun, I win.

But greater than the creation is the Creator. And He will judge everything, whether good or evil.

[23:17] If I suffer for Christ under the sun, Paul says that we are to be more pitied than anyone.

But you see, under the sun isn't the last word. God the Creator has the last word. That last word of judgment. And He will judge.

So the author says this. The end of the matter and all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Now, we don't live under the commandments, right? We don't live under the Mosaic Law. Can I get an amen? It was kind of weak. There's some people thinking maybe we should go sacrifice a lamb. But no, we don't live under the Mosaic Law. Christ came and fulfilled it. It's been set aside. So we don't fulfill the commandments today. What do we do? We serve the Lord. Do you remember when Jesus was in the desert?

[24:19] And Satan came to tempt Him? And one of the things that he said was, Worship me. And Jesus said, No. We are to worship and serve the Lord Almighty and Him alone.

In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us that we are to serve the Lord with our whole heart. In Romans 12, verse 11. And I bring this up to you today.

On this, the final Sunday of the year 2025. Okay. There are some of us in this group here who have lived a quarter of this century.

Right? 25 years of this century. And some of us have also lived a quarter of a century of the previous one. That just blew my mind this weekend. You guys are all thinking, whatever.

Whatever. So here we go. Let me wrap this up. As you take time this week, and you should take time, consider how or if you will serve the Lord.

[25:30] And while you do that, I want you to write this verse down. Don't look it up now. It's a really challenging verse. And I don't want to make it any worse than I already have.

My friends, let me just say this to you. It is really hard to serve the Lord. Being men and women of integrity, who honor God with our lives and with our words, who put a bridle on our tongue, who hold our frustration in check, who honor God not just with words, but with how we live our life, it is hard.

It is really, really hard. We face great temptation. It is so easy to follow the way of the world. And I'm going to tell you this.

If you don't take the time to plan ahead, if you don't live a life that is considered, if you don't stop and pause and consider, how am I going to handle these situations, you will follow the way of the world.

It is only through taking this time to stop and to think and to consider that we are successful in living for the Lord.

[26:58] And by successful, I don't mean here under the sun. We may have success here under the sun. Billy Graham. Various other men.

But no, our reward waits before us. When we stand before the judge. It's hard to remember that. Getting up, going to work, getting home, going to bed, getting up, going to work, going home. It's hard to remember that when we see people who are cutting corners and getting away with it.

It's hard to remember that when there is that battle within us. Do we do right or do we do wrong? But if we take the time beforehand to set our hearts on the Lord, He will never forget it. And when we stand before Him, He will honor that. So I challenge you. It takes about an hour to read the book of Ecclesiastes.

[28:07] And it will help you to get in the mindset of planning for this new year. It's an hour. You spend more time than that doom scrolling on your phone.

Or whatever it is that you do. I encourage you. Either get up beforehand. Or stay awake a little bit. Or carve out a lunch time.

Spend some time. How will you serve the Lord this year? Let's pray.