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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson for September 28
 Golden Text.—Fear God, and keep his commandments.—Eccles. 12: 13

The Lesson as a Whole
 "I said in mine heart." "Under the sun." These are two of the key expressions in the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is the record of the efforts of a man to find the supreme good, apart from divine revelation. He looks, into his own heart, follows its dictates, and after trying all that earth has to offer finds all is vanity or emptiness. Worldly folly never satisfied anyone who sought it. Frivolity may captivate the senses for a moment, but it leaves regret behind. How many a devotee of pleasure has exclaimed at last, "Life is not worth living!" Solomon tried to find solace in the pleasures of the wine cup, though determined not to act the part of a fool and allow himself to become a drunkard. He would drink in moderation, hoping in this to find "what was good for the sons of men." His Book tells how vain was the effort to find lasting enjoyment in self-indulgence of any kind. He had almost unlimited wealth, and he determined not to deny himself anything that his eyes desired or his heart craved. He gave himself, for a time, at least, wholly to the pursuit of self-gratification, hoping in this to find perfect happiness. But as he looked back upon wasted years and blighted hopes he realized that the selfish life is the empty life. All was emptiness and a pursuit of the wind. Nothing under the sun can satisfy a man made for eternity.

His final judgment is that the only worthy objective of life is to know God and to seek to serve Him faithfully. This alone gives lasting peace and satisfaction.
 Verse by Verse
 Eccles. 1: 2.—"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." The natural man finds himself as on a great whirling wheel, with no power to stay the controlling hand of what seems like a relentless fate, as the following verses show. So he finds life to be all vanity and a pursuit after the wind. But the Spirit-taught believer looks up and sees an exalted Christ at God's right hand and knows that He is, in Himself, the wisdom of God, and so he can commit his life in confidence to His loving care, and can exclaim with gladness, "For to me to live in Christ, and to die is gain."
 Verse 17.—"I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly." Determined to try everything that seemed as though it might contribute to lasting satisfaction, Solomon sought to enrich his mind with learning and culture, and also to enjoy the vain, empty pleasures of earth, but each proved a disappointment and ended in " vexation of spirit."
 Chap. 2: 1.—"I said in my heart.....I will prove thee with mirth." There is a temporary excitement as one throws himself into the whirl of worldly folly but it gives neither lasting peace nor enduring happiness. After trying it all, the verdict is "this also is vanity." It is the judgment of the disillusioned misanthropist. He who lives for self, seeking to gratify his thirst for pleasure, will awake at the end to realize his days have been wasted, and he will loathe what once he thought so worth while.
 Verse 11.—"I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and.....there was no profit under the sun." Even those things which seem useful and well worth while, such as the erection of great buildings and the laying out of beautiful gardens (vs. 4, 5,) fail to meet the deepest needs of the soul of man.

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It would be poor comfort to a dying man to look back over a life spent largely in developing natural resources or improving property if he was going out into eternity without God and therefore without hope.

Verse 21.—"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and..... enjoy good in his labour." To this conclusion the philosophical mind naturally comes, so long as one looks only "under the sun." for God Himself has decreed that in the sweat of his face man should eat his bread. Labor is therefore a great blessing, but true satisfaction is not found even in it, no matter how faithfully and assiduously one performs his tasks and no matter how temperately he conducts himself.
 Chap. 12: 1.—"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." After trying every other object that might prove to be the supreme good for man, the Preacher comes back to God. He alone can satisfy. Happy is the one who turns to Him in life's springtime, before the winter of life comes on when, to a large extent, the soul is no longer keen to respond to the divine voice.

Verse.—"The clouds return after the rain." These verses, through S. are a beautiful poem, in which the body is looked upon as a house and it is seen going into decay because of increasing years. The light is no longer bright, for the mind is clouded. Youth's spring and manhood's summer are ended and the days of winter are coming on apace.

Verse 3.—"When the keepers of the house (that is, the hands) shall tremble (palsied with old age)..... the strong men (the legs) bow themselves, and the grinders (the teeth) cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows (the eyes) be darkened."

Verse 4.—"The doors..... shut in the streets (the deafness that comes with years)..... the sound of the grinding (it is really the grinding-woman; that is, the tongue) is low." The old man is nervous and restless and is up with the birds, and "the daughters of musick (the vocal cords)" no longer function as of yore.

Verse 5.—"Afraid of that which is high, and fears..... in the way" as he walks with uncertain steps. "The almond tree shall flourish," covered with white blossoms like the hoary head, and little things are troublesome. "Man goeth to his long (lit., "eternal") home and the mourners go about the streets."

Verse 6.—"The silver (that is, the spinal) cord be loosed." "The golden bowl (the brain pan) be broken, or the pitcher (the lungs)" and "the wheel (the heart)" cease to function.

Verse 7.—"Then shall the dust return to the earth," but "the spirit" as a distinct, living entity, goes out to have to do with God.

Verse 8.—"All is vanity" when life is over; if one has forgotten God, all is worthless, and life a tragic failure.

Verse 13.—"The conclusion of the whole matter" is that man should fear God and obey Him. This is his whole duty.

Verse 14.—"God shall bring every work into judgment." Man is to be judged according to his works. Therefore it is important that he know God and serve Him—then he will not have to bewail a wasted life at last.

The Heart of the Lesson
 God has created man with capacity to hear His voice and yield to Him. This alone brings lasting satisfaction. To endeavor to find it in the world is only to be disappointed. There is nothing under the sun that can give peace and rest. All below is but vanity and like chasing after the wind. Only when God is given His rightful place does the soul enter into and enjoy the peace that passes all understanding.

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