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Ecclesiastes 1 and 2
Pentecost 8

More than Mist

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever! Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

You walk out on a brisk fall morning and you see it: your breath leaves your mouth as a tiny cloud of vapor that spreads and rises, and then just as quickly it is gone.

You exhale onto the mirror and for a moment there is a tiny cloud of mist, but then it vanishes right before your eyes.

A foggy mist fills the air for a few minutes, but soon the weather changes and soon the mist vanishes without a trace, not even the sidewalk is damp.

This is the picture that King Solomon, called **Ecclesiastes**, a word meaning teacher, uses in our lesson when he says: **“Nothing but vapor. Totally vapor. Everything is just vapor that vanishes.”**

Only he isn't talking about a literal fog or mist vanishing before your eyes. Instead, Solomon is using the fleeting nature of a cloud of vapor to describe well, just about everything in this world: **I applied my heart to seek out and explore with wisdom everything done under the sky. I have seen all the actions done under the sun, and, look, it is all nothing but vapor. It is all chasing the wind.**

Just as mist on a piece of glass doesn't last, but melts away quickly, so it goes with all that belongs to this sin-ruined world. It can all disappear as quickly as a puff of air. None of it can bring true and lasting meaning, purpose, satisfaction, because it just does not last, or we ourselves do not last.

Take for example what Solomon talks about so much in our lesson: **all the results of my hard work... there may be a man who has worked hard—wisely, aptly, and skillfully. But he must hand over whatever he accumulated by all his hard work to a man who has not worked hard for it.**

A person can spend their lifetime on carefully building up a fortune, a company, a house, a collection, a career. They pour their heart and soul, hard work and dedication into it to get it all just so. And then death comes and all they worked so hard for goes to someone else who might not care about it at all, who might ruin it, forget about, wreck it all. But even if it goes to someone who treasures it, it still doesn't do anything for the person who had died!

Of course you don't have to even wait until the end of life to see how quickly the results of hard work can disappear like a morning mist.

The child builds a beautiful Lego creation only to watch it fall and shatter into pieces before they can show mom and dad. The college student works hard on the term paper, but the computer crashes and their work is lost. Overnight, deer devour the beautiful garden you carefully tended. Rising inflation nibbles away at the carefully prepared nest egg.

The new 'toy' that was going to make you so happy and satisfied soon grows old and boring like all the rest. The treasured relationship falls apart or is broken by death.

What does a man gain through all his hard work... under the sun? Bah! Pain fills his days. His occupation is frustration. Even at night his heart does not rest. This too is vapor. And so after all the pain, sweat, sacrifice and frustration, you're left with nothing!

The point should be clear: the things of the world cannot save you. Neither can people, pleasures, possessions, nor philosophies bring you a true and lasting peace and satisfaction.

God's Word teaches us this truth. But much of this can also be seen from experience, so much so that many popular song writers have said things similar to Solomon's point: The Rolling Stones sang: *I can't get no satisfaction.* The band Kansas crooned: *All we do crumbles to the ground, though we refuse to see, dust in the wind... all we are is dust in the wind.* Tennessee Ford lamented: *You load sixteen tons and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt!*

Yes, we should know this, and yet we can so easily fool ourselves into thinking that if we just got that, or just made that much more money, or just had a little more time, or whatever else, then, *then*, we would be satisfied! But if King Solomon, who had both amazing wisdom, astounding riches and abundant accomplishments didn't find peace in what he did or owned, then neither will we!

Now if all we ever had were the vapor-like things of this world, we could only despair in this life and in the life to come. After all, if all our hard work can't bring true and lasting peace in this brief life, then there is no way anything we could do, could ever bring us eternal life with God!

This all shows us we are indeed **children of Adam**, the first sinner, who rebelled against God. And we all share his imperfect sinful condition that brought thorns and frustration, dust and death into this world. And so that's all we have a right to ever expect from the Holy God, especially when we consider how much time, effort, energy and trust we put into the temporary that will not matter in a 100 years, all while neglecting what the Lord says is most important.

But then Solomon speaks the unexpected: **There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink and to find joy in his work. This too, I saw, is from God's hand. For who can eat or enjoy himself apart from him?**

Wait a second! How can one moment Solomon say **Bah!** Life is **frustration** and that **work** and all it brings is nothing more than **vapor that vanishes** and then the next he can speak of **finding joy in work** as well as **eating** and **drinking**?

Only because of these words: **this... is from God's hand.** Up till now, Solomon has been using the words 'I' and 'my' and talking about what human beings can do. But the moment he speaks of hope, he speaks of the **hand** of the eternal God.

You see the key to understanding the book of Ecclesiastes is that Solomon is showing two very different viewpoints. One is all life could be without God, and the other is life lived trusting in the Lord. For the eternal God can does gives us more than mist, He and He alone gives us what will truly last forever.

Just consider the great and everlasting gift from God we have come to receive this very day as we gather in worship: the living and enduring Word of God. The promises God gives you in the Bible are far more than passing breath.

God's Word is more solid and enduring than the mountains. For the day will come when the mountains will tumble into the heart of the sea (Psalm 46), but God's Word will stand forever. Just consider how many mighty kingdoms and great empires in history have stood opposed to God's Word, but now they are all gone and turned to dust and the Word remains with us still today!

Yes, God's promises are more permanent than the oceans. His words are more certain than the ground beneath your feet and the sky above your head. And Jesus tells us that **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away** (Matthew 24:35).

And just think what His word says to you! The Almighty and eternal God, who owes us nothing, chose to save the fallen **children of Adam**. He came to rescue us from the curse of sin that makes us and everything in this world fail and fade like so much vanishing mist.

And so in Jesus Christ, we can talk about the literal flesh and blood **hand of God**, for the timeless and eternal God the Son took on the flesh and blood of the **children of Adam** with tiny hands as he laid in a manger.

With a love and mercy **greater** than the heavens are above the earth (Psalm 103), Jesus would stretch out his hands, the hands of God in human flesh and blood to be nailed to a cross and die in our place. Yes, He who is from everlasting to everlasting would let his life pass away like a puff of air on the cross, because He chose to take the curse for your sin and mine.

But then the Son of God turned the tables and made death which seems so permanent to now be no more than a passing cloud of fog, melted by the rising sun, for on the third day Jesus' body returned to life and He held up nail-scarred but ever-living hands as He declared forgiveness and peace to His people! And remember, what Jesus promises is certain and secure, so when He says you are forgiven, you *are forgiven!*

And so the result is that all who trust in Christ now have a life that will not fade away like mist, but last forever, just as His declares: **By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... into an inheritance that is undying... and unfading, kept in heaven for you** (1 Peter 1:3-4). Indeed, Jesus will even raise our bodies to endless life and glory like his at the resurrection!

But notice Jesus' saving work doesn't just change our eternal future, but it changes our lives in this world too! **There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink and to find joy in his work. This too, I saw, is from God's hand.**

If all we had were the things of the world, if we put our faith and our hope for satisfaction in food, drink, work and possessions, they will disappoint us now and eternally.

But for the believer in Jesus, we have a new outlook on life. Christ has redeemed our whole life and so gives purpose and meaning to everything in the believer's life. Now we can recognize food, drink, work, relationships and possessions not as the purpose or goal of our lives, but as a gift from our God for us to enjoy and to use to serve the Lord and others around us with faith-filled gratitude! Instead of letting things control us, we can now use and enjoy them to God's glory!

And that means that even the temporary things like having coffee with a friend or mowing the lawn, are so much more than mist, because through faith in Jesus they become a way to honor our Lord, just like we hear in a well-known verse from Corinthians: **Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God** (10:31). Yes, the life of one who trusts in Christ has meaning in everything, even as we use the passing things of this world to God's glory!

Yes, everything around us in this world will still **vanish** like your breath on a cold day, but the life you have from Christ and the life you live in Jesus will stand forever, just like His Word, just like His saving love for you. Amen.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. Amen.