



11th Sunday after Pentecost^t
August 8, 2010
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26

Meaningless...Meaningful!

"Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, she-hakol barah lichvodo. Amen." (Traditional Hebrew blessing meaning: *"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who created everything for his glory. Amen."*) Hello, my name is Shalomo. At least, that's what my mom and dad called me. You probably know me as "Solomon." My name means, "Peace." I think you know my dad. His name was David. He was a great King! I think you probably know my mom as well. Her name was Bathsheba. You know her for less noble reasons. I was the child she had *after* the one the Lord had said would die. Dad said he named me Shalomo because of the *peace* that God's forgiveness brings. The prophets called me by another name – "Jedidiah." That means "loved by the Lord." But I'll get into that a little later. First, I want to read you something I wrote. I wrote this almost 3000 years ago, but as I walked through your town, I couldn't help but think it would apply now every bit as well as it did in my day. Some things never change.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."... I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. ²⁴ A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Everything on this earth is meaningless. It's like vapor or smoke. You have something one second and the next it's gone like your breath on a cold winter's day. Earthly wealth, your family, your job, your hobbies, you name it...It's all meaningless on its own! I know what you're thinking. This guy's a barrel of fun☺! But let me explain how I came to the conclusions I did when I looked out at the world. I wasn't always this gray haired, bearded, old man that stands before you today. In fact, my life was an adventure from start to finish and it was one of...privilege...to say the least.

Dad always told me I'd be king after him. He told me he was setting the stage for me to have a peace-filled rule when I grew up. My dad, David, had defeated every enemy from all around and every country that surrounded us paid tribute to Israel. We were **the** world power. But I wasn't a shoe-in for the kingship. David, my father said that I would be king. Nathan, the prophet said that I would be king. But try convincing my older brothers of that – you see, I wasn't the oldest, not even close! When I was about 20, my older brother Adonijah sped up my rise to the throne by declaring himself King. My Dad had to act quickly and make me king before everyone followed my brother. The plan worked. There I was – 20 years old and I'm the ruler of the greatest nation in the world.

Most 20 year olds know everything, right? That's not how I felt. Dad reassured me that if I would just walk in the ways of the Lord, God would bless my steps. That's just what I needed to hear. In fact, at that time, I wanted nothing more! One night, the LORD appeared to me in a dream and told me I could ask for anything I wanted. What an offer! What would you ask for? I surprised him with my answer, I think. Well, as much as you can surprise God who knows everything.

Do you know what I asked for? I asked for wisdom. Well, actually I asked for a "listening heart." I knew I was young and inexperienced and I knew that I wasn't up for the task, so I asked God to make me ready. And, boy did he! I'm not trying to brag here, but he made me the wisest man that has ever lived and will ever live. And God gave me the opportunity to prove it. The case that made me famous was when these two prostitutes came before me with a complaint. They both had infants who were about the same age. They both slept in the same bed with the infants. One night, one of the mothers accidentally suffocated her infant. Now these two women were pleading their case before me, begging me to believe that the surviving infant was theirs. What was I to do? This is before DNA testing. And then it came to me – I ordered the surviving baby to be cut in half – fair is fair. When I did that, one woman said, "Good, do it!" while the other said, "No, she can have him, just let him live!" Immediately I knew who the child belonged to. The one who was willing to give up the child was the real mother. From that incident my fame grew and people came from all over the world to see my wisdom...and my wealth.

Oh, yeah, I almost forgot about that. When I asked for wisdom, God told me that since I didn't ask for wealth or long life or death to my enemies, he'd give me all those other things as well! And boy did he! My father was the fighter...well, I was the lover. I had 700 wives of royal birth from all over the world and 300 concubines. My daily provisions as king were like the size of your Woodman's grocery store...everyday! I had 12,000 horses at the ready. I read in your paper about an un-employment rate of 10%? You should make me president - I had 180,000 people involved in the building of the Temple and my Palace alone. My palace, by the way, was about 33,000 square feet with three floors and ceilings of 15-20 feet. All the surrounding nations paid me tribute to the tune of literally over 25 **tons** of gold a year! There was so much silver in my kingdom that it was as common as stones and nobody considered it very valuable. This is a beautiful facility that we're in now, but the temple was out of this world - picture this place we're in now, covered in gold and you'd start to come close. I was greater in wisdom than any man, but also greater in riches than all the other kings of the earth!...And it almost ruined me.

All those things led me away from what was really important. I started thinking more about the earthly things that God gave me. I only cared about me and my stuff. My wives were always nagging me to worship their gods with them. At first, I did it just for them. Then my heart started to be in it. This was just what God warned me about and just what I was so confident would never happen. Because of it the Lord told me that all this that I had amassed, my kingdom, my wealth, my people were all going to be taken from me...actually from my son. If God is right, and he always is, Rehoboam is going to bring to ruin everything I ever worked for...who am I kidding. He'll bring to ruin everything God has ever given me. It's like I said before - everything is meaningless!

It's a warning. Don't do what I did. I put my hope in the stuff of this life - it's a vapor...it's a breath and then it's gone. I don't want to be presumptuous, but as I walked around Greenville, I saw a lot of stuff. It was said of my day that every man ate from his own vine and fig tree and drank from his own cistern. That was living in the lap of luxury. I think it's safe to say that some of you have way more than that! And don't get me wrong - that's a wonderful blessing from God - that's a good thing! I just see the danger that I faced. My life became about *getting* what I still didn't have rather than *giving* what God has given me. I sought peace in having one more gold piece, one more servant, one more wife. And it all went up in smoke. That's what happens with earthly wealth - God gives and he takes away. There is no peace in it. So don't look for it there. How do you know if you are? When health keeps you up nights and work stresses you out and money always seems too short and you think you deserve more and your jealous of what your neighbor has - those are all indications that you're try to find peace in meaningless earthly blessings.

It took me a long time to get that. Finally, when I was nearing the end of my life and looking back on it, I learned that there was only one thing that gave me peace. Or rather, one person. We call him Messiah. That's the Hebrew name. You maybe know him better by his Greek name, "Christ." The Anointed One of God who would come and save us from our sins. The one that God promised to Adam and Eve would come and crush our enemy Satan. My father, David, wrote so clearly about him. About how he'd suffer and cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" About how people would hurl insults at him while he was being tortured. About how they would pierce his hands and his feet. Messiah is my shepherd. Because of what he would do, I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever, just like my dad wrote. This Messiah is our Savior. That's right, you know the Greek names better. Savior in Greek is Jesus. This Christ is Jesus.

Take all the wealth, wives, power, striving, discontent - those things are meaningless. Give me Jesus - he gives my life true meaning. Don't you see. When you realize what is most meaningful in your life, even the meaningless earthly things take on meaning. You constantly recognize them as gifts from God to be used for his glory. I told you earlier that my name is Shalomo - peace. I have peace in my Savior. I told you that the other name the prophets called me was Jedidiah - "Loved by the Lord." As I look at my life, I was not "loved by the Lord" because of all the earthly things God gave me. The greatest way God loved me was that he saved me.

And so I want to give you all a new name. From now on, I am going to call you "Jedidiah." You have the benefit of looking back on the Savior that I could only look forward to - you are truly "loved by the Lord." You have the benefit of having God come to you in baptism in a special way and put his name on you - you are truly "loved by the Lord." You have the benefit of receiving the sacrifice price of Messiah's very body and blood - you are truly "loved by the Lord." You are Jedidiah. And that, dear friends, gives life meaning.

"Shema, Yisrael, adonai elohenu, adonai echad. Amen." ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.")
- Deuteronomy 6:4 -