

26-0301a Transcript

26-0301a - *Chasing the Wind, Tom Freed*

Bible Readers: Mike Mathis and John Nousek This transcript transcribed by TurboScribe.ai,
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Chasing the Wind

Solomon's Search for Meaning Under the Sun

Scripture Readings

1st Reading (0:04 - 0:31): Mike Mathis Ecclesiastes 1:2: (0:04) The first scripture reading is taken from Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and verse 2, which reads, (0:16) Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. (0:28) And that concludes the reading. (0:31)	2nd Reading (0:36 - 1:02): John Nousek Ecclesiastes 1:14: (0:36) Well, good morning. Also in the book of Ecclesiastes, (0:41) this morning we'll hear from chapter 1 verse 14. God says to us, I have seen all the works that (0:51) are done under the sun. And indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Amen. (1:02)
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Transcript (0:04 - 33:06), Preacher: Tom Freed

(1:07) Good morning. Good to see everybody. You can't tell I was reading Ecclesiastes. (1:14) Inspired me to do a couple of sermons on it.

So I got this morning and the night was on Ecclesiastes. (1:21) So for whatever reason, it's one of my favorite books, probably because it speaks to my negative (1:28) side, which I try to work on, but you know, it's something I struggle with. So we got (1:36) one today on vanity and tonight on nothing new under the sun, which a book can seem bleak (1:45) and depressing, but you know, at the end, it does have a good ending, an uplifting ending.

So (1:56) today's is: "Chasing the wind: Solomon's search for meaning under the sun." (2:03) Imagine a man who truly had it all.

Picture the wisest mind the ancient world ever knew. (2:11) Deeper insight than any philosopher before or since. (2:17) Imagine a world so vast it defies counting.

Gold, palaces, vineyards, servants beyond number. (2:26) Picture absolute power, armies at his command, alliances with kings, a kingdom at peace, (2:34) and pleasures, whatever his heart desired. Fine food, music, beauty, romance was his for the (2:45) taking.

His accomplishments reshaped history. Even today, we marvel at what he built, (2:54) especially the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, his own vast palace that took twice as long to (3:00) complete. And as the sun sets on his life, this man pauses, looking back over it all, (3:10) and breathes out one aching honest verdict.

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. That preacher, (3:22) that man is the preacher, the voice behind the book Ecclesiastes. (3:28) Tradition identifies him as King Solomon, and through his word we get one of the Bible's (3:36) most honest looks at life.

Raw, sobering, about everything being vanity, (3:43) yet it opens the door to surprising hope. Solomon conducted perhaps the greatest personal (3:52) experiment in human history. He set out to test everything under the sun, wisdom, pleasure, work, (4:02) wealth, achievement, to discover what could satisfy the human soul.

(4:08) So he did it all. He experimented with everything. (4:13) He spared no expense.

He held nothing back. And after chasing every horizon, (4:20) he arrived at this stark conclusion. All is vapor.

(4:27) The Hebrew word he translated as vanity is Hebel, a term that appears 38 times in this short book. (4:37) So if you ever read Ecclesiastes, you hear it a lot. Vanity, over and over.

(4:45) Literally, Hebel means vapor, mist, breath, or pump of wind. Think of it. You exhale on a cold morning, (4:55) and for a split second you see your breath hanging in the air, beautiful, real, yet impossible to (5:03) grasp or hold.

The next moment, it's gone. That's Hebel. Life, achievements, pursuits, (5:13) they appear substantial, but they slip through our fingers like a mist.

(5:22) This is especially true with money. As Solomon himself wrote in Proverbs 23.5, (5:32) cast with a glance at riches, and they are gone. (5:36) They will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

(5:42) I'm sure we've all experienced this with money. You finally think we're ahead, we have a couple (5:48) thousand saved, and all of a sudden your car breaks down, you got to go to the hospital or (5:54) the dentist bill. Money just flies away, especially if you're really rich.

Some of these people lose (6:01) billions and millions in one day. Why does this ancient voice still speak so powerfully to us (6:10) today? Because we live in a world obsessed with the same pursuit Solomon chased. Wealth, pleasure, (6:21) knowledge, experience, status.

We scroll, hustle, accumulate, convince the next promotion, (6:30) bigger house, better car, the relationship will finally fill us. Yet so often we wake up sensing (6:39) the same emptiness. How many of us have done that? I know I have.

You think with something, (6:46) a house, that promotion, certain paycheck, you're going to finally be happy. (6:53) But what ultimately happens is you're only happy temporarily. Then you're looking for something more.

(7:01) This is Solomon discovered. Most of us are never satisfied. We get what we want.

(7:09) We always want more. He captured it perfectly in Proverbs 27:20. (7:19) Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man.

(7:25) Just like death in the grave that never say enough. Our eyes, our desires keep searching, (7:33) always hungry for the next thing, never content. Once again, he talks about wealth, (7:44) and even

more directly in Ecclesiastes 5:10, why we can't be satisfied.

Whoever loves money, (7:55) whoever loves money never has enough. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. (8:03) This too is meaningless.

Look at all these billionaires, (8:10) you know, millionaires and billionaires, and they're still not happy with that much money. We think, (8:14) what could you possibly spend all that money on? But they never stop wanting more money. (8:22) Even with us, often, you know, that we want more, we always spend what we could get.

(8:31) I make more than I imagined I would, and I'm more broke now than ever. So what happens? You know, (8:39) we make more money and we spend it on bigger, better things. (8:45) None of us probably could be satisfied with more money or more things.

(8:52) The heart simply can't be satisfied with material things. They promise to fill the void, (8:58) but they only deepen it, leaving us with more chasing after the wind. (9:06) As we look at Ecclesiastes together, we'll walk through Solomon's extraordinary life, (9:14) his unrivaled wisdom, his countless wealth, his unmatched power, (9:19) and discover how even the greatest earthly gains prove empty apart from God.

(9:25) My hope is that this message will lead us to examine our own pursuits (9:30) and find true meaning, not in the things of this world, but in fearing God and keeping (9:35) his commandments, as Solomon concludes in Ecclesiastes 12, 13. (9:44) Let's begin with Solomon's wisdom, for it was a foundation of his reign (9:49) and a lens through which he viewed life. In 1 Kings 3, we read how Solomon asked God for (9:59) wisdom to govern Israel, and God granted it in abundance.

(10:05) I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, (10:10) that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 1 Kings 3, 12.

(10:19) This is the wisest man to ever set foot on the earth that ever existed, I guess apart from Jesus. (10:27) But nobody before or after has ever been this wise. This wasn't ordinary smarts.

It was divine (10:36) insight that made kings and queens travel from afar to hear him. Scripture details the breadth (10:45) of his knowledge in 1 Kings 4, 33. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, (10:55) even under the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.

He also spoke of beasts, (11:02) and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. Imagine that. (11:11) Solomon was like a master scholar in five profound categories of the natural world.

(11:19) First, in botany, the study of plants. He knew everything from the majestic cedars of Lebanon, (11:28) towering symbols of strength, down to the humble hyssop, a tiny herb sprouting from (11:33) cracks in the walls, used in purification rituals. He could discourse on their growth, (11:42) uses, and secrets as if he held a doctorate in plant sciences.

(11:49) His second degree, in our terms, would be in zoology. Do you know anybody that has a degree (11:58) in zoology? Focusing on beasts or land animals, Solomon understood the habits of the lions in the (12:08) wild, the strength of oxen in the field, and the cunning of foxes. It's great when you read (12:17) Proverbs, you can see all these things.

He talks about them. Third is ornithology, the study of (12:23) birds, where he spoke of eagles

soaring high and sparrows nesting low, drawing lessons from their (12:32) flights and songs. Fourth is herpetology and entomology combined, for creeping things like (12:43) reptiles and insects, snakes slithering in the dust, ants marching in orderly lines, (12:52) teaching diligence, as in Proverbs 6.6. And fifth is ichthyology, the study of fish, (13:01) encompassing the creatures of rivers and seas, from the great leviathan to the smallest minnow.

(13:10) This guy had basically five advanced degrees in nature, believe it or not. (13:19) The Bible tells us he spoke 3,000 Proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs, verse Kings 4.32. (13:28) And then verse 34 says there came people from all nations, from all the kings of the earth, (13:36) just to hear his wisdom. In modern terms, he was a polymath with advanced degrees in biology, (13:46) ecology, and natural history.

This was a guy more brilliant, like the Bible said, than anybody (13:54) that's ever existed. This guy was truly a celebrity on steroids for his time. (14:02) I think Elon Musk meets Oprah meets Taylor Swift.

It's a weird combination, but that's basically (14:12) what this guy was. He was a songwriter. He wrote his own song.

You know, he didn't have auto-tune (14:18) either. He was a billionaire, master teacher, and influencer. He was world famous at the time, (14:30) which is very impressive because it was all word of mouth or letters.

It wasn't like today (14:37) when you have all the social media and anybody can be famous. I mean, you really had to be (14:43) something impressive to be famous then and have people travel from around the world to see you. (14:52) Yet in Ecclesiastes 1, 16 through 18, he reflects, (14:57) I thought to myself, look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has (15:04) ruled over Jerusalem before me.

I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge, and I applied (15:13) myself to the understanding of wisdom and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this too (15:20) is chasing after the wind. With much wisdom comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief.

(15:31) We can see that Solomon's pursuit of knowledge, as vast as it was, led to only vanity. (15:38) They say that highly intelligent people are more depressed at times because they notice (15:43) every little thing. They see all these things in the world, all these problems that can't be solved.

(15:52) That's what he was like. The more intelligent, you know, the more he knew, the more depressed (15:58) and miserable it seemed like he got. Why? Because wisdom under the sun, apart from the eternal (16:06) perspective, only reveals the brokenness of the world.

It shows us problems without ultimate (16:15) solutions, cycles of life without lasting purpose. If the smartest man who ever lived found knowledge (16:25) empty, what does that say about our own endless chasing after degrees, certifications, advanced (16:34) education, or intellectual achievements? That's huge in this country and in Europe and other places. (16:42) All these degrees, all this education.

We pour years into education thinking it will bring (16:49) fulfillment, status, or security. Now Solomon's example shows it's all vapor unless rooted in the (16:56) fear of the Lord. Because the

beginning of truism, Proverbs 9, 10.

How many people do you know that (17:04) go to school their whole lives? You had a husband that went like 12 years. It's like, why don't you (17:11) going to get a job? You know, it's like you can't go to school forever. I think a lot of people are (17:16) better off using that time just to study the Bible.

They'd save a ton of money and probably be a lot (17:24) wiser. Not only wisdom, but wealth marks Solomon's life. The Bible says Solomon's annual gold intake (17:36) was 666 talents, roughly 25 tons, which at current prices equates to around \$4 billion every year, (17:47) 1 Kings 10.14. Silver was so plentiful it was as common as stones, verse 27.

And that doesn't (17:56) even include the massive income from trade, tributes, and gifts. He was probably making 10 (18:04) to 20 billion annually every year. That's a lot of money.

We're talking wealth on a scale that (18:13) dwarfs most modern fortunes. Yet even that staggering wealth couldn't fill the emptiness (18:19) of his soul. He also built a magnificent temple, a palace that took 13 years to construct, (18:30) and gardens with exotic imports.

The queen of Sheba exclaimed, (18:37) the half was not told to me. My wisdom and prosperity exceeded the fame which I heard, (18:44) 1 Kings 10.7. Even the queen of Sheba, who was powerful and famous in her own right, (18:53) was blown away. His throne was ivory overlaid with gold.

Even all the silverware in his house (19:02) was gold. His ships brought peacocks and precious stones. Power, he ruled from the Euphrates to (19:13) Egypt with 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, 1 Kings 10.26. No king matched his splendor.

(19:25) He was the most powerful king in the land. In Ecclesiastes 2, 4 through 11, Solomon recounts (19:33) his experiments with wealth and pleasure. I undertook great projects.

I built houses for (19:42) myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in (19:49) them. I made reservoirs to water growth of flourishing trees.

I bought male and female (19:57) slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herd and flock than (20:03) anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings (20:10) and provinces.

I acquired men and women singers and had a harem as well. The delight of the heart (20:21) of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

In all this, my wisdom stayed (20:31) with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took (20:41) delight in all my work and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my (20:49) hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless. A chasing after the (20:56) wind.

Nothing was gained under the sun. It does sound depressing, you know. He did all these things (21:04) and he feels like it meant nothing.

We see the same dilemma today. (21:12) Many professional athletes and celebrities, people with fame, fortune, and material possessions most (21:20) of us can only dream of, end up saying the

same exact thing. They've got the mansions, the cars, (21:29) the endorsements, the crowds cheering their name, yet so often they confess that it all feels empty.

(21:39) Some have said when you win the championship or a world title there's nothing else to live for, (21:45) there's nothing to achieve. Some have even reached such deep misery that they've contemplated taking (21:52) their own life. One powerful example is Deion Sanders.

Prime time hit it all. NFL stardom, (22:03) Super Bowl rings, millions in the bank, countless women and worldwide fame. He was even a rapper.

(22:13) Must be the money. I don't know if any of you remember that fight, (22:18) you know, but I do. He was popular, you know.

A lot of these guys do it all. They sing, they rap, (22:25) they play football, basketball, are in movies. But behind the flash he was broken, (22:35) depressed, empty, and at one point suicidal.

In his own words, he hit rock bottom (22:42) until he finally surrendered his life to Christ. Now he talks openly about how Jesus (22:49) changed everything and gave him real purpose. We see that a lot of times with celebrities.

(22:58) You know, they're depressed, they're on drugs, a lot of these people die from drug overdoses, (23:06) drinking, but fortunately some of them do find Christ and they finally fill that void. (23:15) See the pattern? Solomon chased opulence and power, thinking they'd satisfy, but they (23:22) evaporated like mist. His well-funded grant projects yet brought no enduring joy.

In our (23:33) age of billionaires, stock portfolios, luxury homes, cars, and endless accumulation, we see the (23:41) same thing Jesus warned about in the parable of the rich fool, Luke 12, 15-21. Jesus starts by (23:51) saying, watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

Life does not consist in an (24:00) abundance of possessions, Luke 12, 15. That goes directly against what this world preaches. (24:08) This world says, have you ever seen the bumper sticker? You know, who has the most toys wins.

(24:17) How many of us love our possessions? You know, I'm a car guy, love my cars, but they just bring (24:23) more pain and suffering. Because when you have these things, they break down, they cost money. (24:30) You know, they bring a lot of pain, you know, and anxiety.

He tells a story of a rich man who (24:42) built bigger barns to store his crops and goods, only for God to call him a fool that very night (24:50) because his soul was required of him. Think of it, I had a boss like that. All he did was work (24:58) in a business and 16 hours a day, probably until he was 80 years old, 90.

(25:04) I saw him and he had cancer and he, you know, looked like he was close to passing away and he (25:09) still only cared about, you know, his business, money, who the political guy was that was (25:18) taking his money from him. It was like, man, why don't you just enjoy life a little? (25:24) What's the point of having all these things if you can't enjoy it? Fortunes amassed, (25:31) empires built, bigger barns filled, only to crumble overnight or be left to air and fighting (25:38) over them. How many of these people work their whole lives to get all this money (25:44) and wealth and then they leave it to their kids to just blow it all on, you know? (25:49) They spend it all in a few years.

(25:54) Jesus drives a point home in Matthew 6, 19 through 21. (25:59) Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy (26:04) and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven (26:10) where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal. (26:15) For where your treasure is, your heart will be also.

(26:20) Solomons, palaces, vineyards, and heaps of gold, (26:25) where the rich fool bigger barns filled with grain, it all comes to the same end. (26:33) All is vanity when we store up things for ourselves and are not rich towards God. (26:39) All that glitters is in vain without the Lord.

(26:43) The pursuing it is chasing after the wind. (26:47) All those shiny things that we go after is all meaningless. (26:57) Power amplifies Solomon's pursuits.

As king, he had absolute authority. (27:04) In Ecclesiastes 4.1, he laments oppression under the sun, (27:10) seeing the tears of the powerless with no comforter. (27:13) Even his rule couldn't fix injustice.

Pleasure, he denied himself nothing. (27:21) Wine, women, 1,000 wives and concubines, 1 Kings 11.3. (27:28) Laughter and folly, Ecclesiastes 2.1-3. (27:32) It all circles back to vanity. Why? Because these are under the sun.

(27:42) Temporal without eternal anchor. (27:46) Solomon's downfall in 1 Kings 11 shows how his heart turned to foreign gods through his wives, (27:54) leading Israel astray. His wealth, wisdom, and power became snares.

(28:02) So all these things actually turned him away from God. (28:06) All these wives and foreign women, he started to worship and follow their gods instead of his own God. (28:19) Even we could stay with wealth and money and certainly turn us away from the Lord.

(28:26) So what do we do with this? (28:29) Look at Solomon as the ultimate example. (28:33) The man who pursued worldly things more successfully than anyone, education, (28:40) knowledge, money, material possessions, power, pleasure, and declared it all vanity. (28:48) We do the same today.

We chase higher degrees thinking they'll define us, (28:54) hoard money and stuff for comfort, climb ladders for status, (29:00) and experience all the pleasures we can in the short existence on earth. (29:08) But Solomon warns without God at the center, it's emptiness multiplied. (29:14) These things can't satisfy the soul God created for himself.

(29:21) How many of us do this, chasing after all these worldly things? (29:26) Many of us have already realized it's all in vain. (29:31) As Jesus said in Matthew 6, 24, no man can serve two masters. (29:38) You cannot serve God and mammon.

(29:41) You've got to make the choice. Are you going after all these worldly things? (29:48) Or are you pursuing the Lord, going after his word, trying to do what's going to make him happy? (29:55) Jesus came to this earth and he could have been greater than Solomon. (29:58) He could have had more.

He could have been a king with all these things. (30:04) But he ended up being homeless with no money because he knew all these things were meaningless. (30:11) His whole life was dedicated to following God's word.

(30:18) Examine your life. What vanities are you pursuing? (30:22) Is your heart set on earthly treasures that moth and rust destroy? (30:28) Solomon's story calls us to repent of that chase and turn to the one that offers lasting fulfillment. (30:39) Solomon's final verdict as in his grand experience is found in Ecclesiastes 12, 13 through 14.

(30:49) Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. (30:54) Fear God and keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man.

(30:59) For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, (31:05) whether it be good or whether it be evil. (31:10) So if you're looking for the purpose in life, this is it. Fear God and keep his commandments.

(31:17) It's pretty simple, but it is difficult, you know, in a material world with so many temptations. (31:27) Let's not chase the wind any longer. Solomon tried it all and came up empty.

(31:34) But praise God, there's hope beyond vanity. (31:38) In Christ we find living water that satisfies eternally, John 4, 14. (31:45) He is wisdom incarnate, 1 Corinthians 1, 30.

(31:50) And he offers forgiveness, purpose, and treasure in heaven that never fades. (31:55) 1 Peter 1, 4. True life isn't found in worldly pursuits, (32:03) but in relationship with a living God through Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again. (32:11) If today the Holy Spirit is convicting you that your pursuits of money, possessions, (32:17) education, or success have left you empty, don't leave here the same.

(32:24) Maybe you've never truly surrendered to Christ, (32:28) or perhaps you've wandered and longed to come back. Right now I invite you to respond. (32:35) If you're ready to turn from vain pursuits and trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, come forward.

(32:44) We'll pray with you and help you take this step of baptism and order (32:48) into Christ for forgiveness of sins and a new life. (32:54) If you're a believer struggling today, come. We'll pray for you and support you however we can.

(33:03) So if the Spirit is moving you, come forward while we sing.