

THE PATHS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."--Eccl. 1:2

Vanity is the keynote to the dirgelike message of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon did not say "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" on account of a temporary depression. He did not speak thus because of some passing adverse circumstance. This statement was not born of the quick and passing bitterness begotten by the foul play of some friend who turned traitor. Subtle pride did not prompt this language of Solomon. These words are the result of experience arrived at after mature and deliberate thought.

These are not the words of a man who walked a FEW paths, but the words of a man who walked MANY paths. They are not the words of one bored with the routine of some prosaic task. They are not the words of a man whose courage failed in some steep ascent of toil; nor the words of one in prostrate rebellion against the tortures of some couch of pain.

Rather let us say that these are the words of one who sailed over many seas of human experience and made, with deliberate care, special notes and charts of his voyages. And in these words Solomon the wise, the rich, and the mighty, has left the testimony that even a king could not and cannot find genuine satisfaction in things finite, in things perishing, in things of the earth.

By what path shall I go to find the home of perfect happiness? Which road must I take to compass heart satisfaction? What must I do to find contentment? In answer, Solomon tried out five paths--leaving each, discarding each in turn, until he cried over the grave of all disappointed hopes, as his life's fair morning died in dark sunset, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" And these five paths, which he tried out and found paths of disappointment, men are trying out today. These five paths, girt oft with flowers, crowded oft with sojourners, beset oft with pits, compass the experiences and imaginations of men. Let us be content to give these five paths telescopic observation, for we shall not have time to give them microscopic scrutiny. May the instruction thereof be received and the warning therein be heeded. Let us glance at:

I. The Path Of Wisdom.

The first thing Solomon tried was wisdom. In Eccl. 1:17 he writes, "I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly." He searched for discernment, for judgment, for moral perception, for intellectual values, for right understanding of life's problems, perplexities and values. He entered the realm of the intellect and searched by all that would make man wise in the wisdom of this world for a contented heart, a restful mind and a happy spirit. Solomon knew everything as nearly as mortal man could know everything. He was a scientist and a philosopher. He was a moralist and a historian. He was a publicist and a poet. He had a mind trained to observe and meditate. He had an imagination by which he interpreted the facts of history and built upon the premise of facts the deductions of science. He walked familiarly through the fields of botany. He brought forth the treasures of the mine. He wrote thousands of imperishable proverbs. He interpreted human experience and philosophized about divine revelation.

But, with all of this, he missed the one essential and found no rest for his heart. It is he, who, after roaming through all the realms of thought and imagination, of human wisdom and knowledge, cried: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Once, a gentleman travelled a long distance for the purpose of having an interview with a distinguished scholar. Upon the presentation of his card, the butler ushered him at once into the study of

his attention to great works. He had to find something to challenge his attention, to engage his interests, and to command his activities. And so he built a palace of cedar for his Egyptian princess and a temple which became one of the seven wonders of the world, for his God. Besides this, he laid out great public works, greatly increased the size and magnificence of his city, transported forests and accomplished such things as multitudes have expected to provide satisfaction for life's labours and the permanency thereof. But when he had finished all his great works he looked out upon them and said: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Time corrodes, storms and fires and earthquakes destroy, and disasters overtake even the mightiest of works. The path of human history is lined with wreckage---great empires, great institutions, great buildings, mighty monuments of mighty men's prowess and achievement.

V. The Path Of Women.

When Solomon had tried the path of wisdom, wine, wealth, and works and had been disappointed in each, he turned to seek happiness with women. With much wisdom given him, he played the fool with women. With much opportunity to do good, he delighted himself in indulgence with women. With the power to command and to persuade, with the whole world from which to choose, with wealth that was enticing, he strove to delight his heart with women.

"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart".

It was Solomon who had seven hundred wives who said: many lovely things about women, lovely things which were true altogether, such as, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord"; "A prudent wife is from the Lord"; and "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband."

But he also said: "It is better to dwell in the corner of the house top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house"; "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman."

What has not woman meant to man? She is the synonym of all that is holy in relation---synonym of all that is encouraging, stimulating, and soothing in life's stress and sorrows. Woman is God's loveliest gift to man. God pity the man who, in the dark hour of his dissolution, has no woman's hand to wipe away the death damp from his brow, or to smooth his pillow, and no woman's voice to whisper sweet words of cheer and comfort into his fast dulling ear.

Woman---the uncomplaining bearer of burdens, the partner of pain and pleasure alike, the keeper of the mysteries of life, the fount of joy, the confidante of weakness and of sorrow, the sharer of tears and laughter. She means to the race all that men's hearts have yearned for, in rest from labor, in refuge from defeat, in comfort from sorrow, in understanding and encouragement.

Many times Solomon doubtless proved all this. And yet, because he left God out and reckoned not with His laws in relation to women, he found the path of women a path of great disappointment. Having tried all the delights of legitimate love, he then indulged himself in all the fancied pleasure of illegitimate love, and excitation of unholy desire and indulgence of animal appetite. Here, in these wide avenues of illegitimate dealings with women, his delight faded into distaste and disgust. And again his soul was wrung with the cry that has saddened the centuries---"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

The very effort to find happiness by the paths of wisdom, of wine, of wealth, of works and of women is written in the lives of men. There will be no disappointment though if you will accept Christ and seek happiness by following Him in a life of service.

the great scholar. He was cordially greeted. Before seating himself he said, "Doctor, I have come a long way to ask you just one question. I observe that the walls of your room are filled with books. I suppose you have read them all. I know you have written many books. You have travelled the world over; you have held intimate converse with the world's wisest men, its leaders of thought, its creators of opinion. Tell me, if you will, after the years you have spent in study, out of the things you have learned, what is the ONE thing best worth knowing?" The great scholar's face flushed with emotion. And he said, "My dear sir, out of all the things I have learned there are only two lessons best worth knowing. The first is, I am a great sinner. The second is, Jesus Christ is a great Saviour. In the knowledge of these two facts as applied in my own personal experience lies all my happiness and all my hopes!" Thus we learn, in that man's answer, that men may know some things and not the best things---the things best worth knowing.

Mere human wisdom never satisfies. There are millions of things we do not know. If we wrote down all that we know it would be a very small volume. If all we do not know were written down it would make a very large library of many, many volumes. But even if we knew all that there is to know in the realm of human knowledge, it would be a path of disappointment if, in knowing so much, we did not learn the two things most worth knowing.

II. The Path Of Wine.

Having tried the path of earthly knowledge and wisdom, and failing to find and get guest room in the house of happiness, Solomon next turned to wine. And so we hear him saying, "Come, now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy thou pleasure"--that is, the pleasure wine is supposed to give. So he descends to the realm of the purely physical to cheer his flesh with wine. I don't think that he descended to the low plain of sordid drunkenness and did some of the fool things that men do when intoxicated. It was he who wrote: "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red..... At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

Solomon discovered for himself and transmitted to future generations the bitterness of that experience and observation which finds in the dregs of the sparkling cup, the sting of the adder and the poison of the serpent. His vivid and true warnings need to be repeated today. Perhaps no factor in American life today is carrying a mightier weight of influence in social, commercial, and political life than the wine and whiskey business, the business without a conscience and the business without a care for the welfare of others. And every drop of the stuff is loaded with disappointment when it comes to bringing lasting joy.

Some, under the demoniac spell of drink, have gone home at night not knowing a buzz saw from a silver dollar, thinking the keyhole the entrance to the Mammoth Cave, and thinking the clothes line a railroad track. And some, mastered by the demon of drink, have gone their way with murder in their eyes and hands. This is an old story and yet a modern story also. A liquor bottle would be an appropriate tombstone over many graves. Certainly a liquor bottle is the tombstone that stands above ruined hopes, broken families, disappointments, bitterness and misery. The bottle, the weak will, the blasted career---then the grave with a bottle as a tombstone. That is the story.

But all who have walked the wine path, whether they be old, or

whether they be young, have found that "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Prov. 20:1. This is not only the truth of God, but the verdict of the ages. Let us consider that verdict.

On an old Egyptian tomb are these words: "His earthly tenement was shattered by beer and wine, and his spirit departed before it was called for."

In 550 B. C. Buddha said: "Drink not liquors that intoxicate and disturb the reason."

In 1340 Chaucer chastised the wine-bibber with the statement: "Character and shame depart when wine comes in."

In 1842 Lincoln said: "Liquor might have defenders, but no defense!"

In 1898 Gladstone said: "The ravages of drink are greater than those of war, pestilence and famine combined."

In 1915 Cardinal Gibbons said: "The great curse of the laboring man is intemperance. It has brought more desolation to the wage earner than strikes or war or sickness or death. It has caused little children to be hungry and cold and to grow up among evil associations. It has broken up more homes and wrecked more lives than any other cause."

Sir Wilfred Grenfell said: "Alcohol has wrecked more lives, starved more children and murdered more women than any other single factor!"

Josephus Daniels said: "The man who opposes prohibition and says in the next breath that he never could tolerate the return of the saloon, either is practicing deception or he does not know that as surely as night follows day, the fall of prohibition means the enthronement of the saloon."

18th Amendment put 177,000 saloons out of business at 466,000 into
It might be interesting for you to know that there were 177,000 saloons in the United States when prohibition went into effect.

At the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 1934 there were 437,704 legalized saloons or approximately two and one-half times as many as in pre-prohibition days. (Prophecy--Feb. 1935--p.11-12)

I shall never favor the use of liquor because as Guy Mark said:

"I have never known booze to contribute to the happiness of a single child, or to the mental ability of a single young person, or to the moral uplift of a single middle-aged person, or to the comfort and blessedness of a single old person."

III. The Path Of Wealth.

"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity."

In these striking words we see that Solomon found the path of riches a disappointing path also. He had an enormous amount of gold. He had a great house which was over thirteen years in building. He had a great house in the forest of Lebanon also. He had many singers and musicians. He had a great throne of ivory. He had many who brought him rich gifts. He had 40,000 horses, 1,400 chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. Yet, even in the security of the nest of his wealth, he fully realized the futility of their values, and cried: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

No man can buy a contented heart, nor a restful soul. Money is powerless to do this. No man can purchase with riches a soul at peace with God. No man can buy a happy home. No man can pay in money the price of the hope of immortality and of a meeting in the Great Beyond. Not even in this day does money guarantee health, or hold friends, or bring contentment.

IV. The Path Of Works.

It is perfectly natural that having tried out wisdom, wine, and wealth, that this man, who had a secure place in life, should turn