



The Vanity of Earthly Existence – Ecclesiastes 3:19-21

One of the more well-known phrases from Ecclesiastes is found here in v. 20. “All are from the dust, and to dust all return.” Marking the beginning of Lent, on Ash

Wednesday this concept is incorporated into the imposition of ashes in the form of a cross on the foreheads of faithful believers as they enter into the preparatory time prior to the celebration of the Resurrection on Easter.

Solomon seems to be questioning the distinction between humanity and the beasts of God’s creation. As a result of sin, both ultimately face death. God breathes life into both humanity and the beasts, which Solomon sees as evidence that there is no advantage to being one of the other. Additionally, Solomon questions whether from an eternal perspective humanity is in an advantaged position either, wondering “whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?” (v. 21)

From humanity’s temporal perspective, these are questions worthy of examination. However, from God’s perspective, there is a critical difference between humanity and the beasts. While both have been impacted by sin and face death and decay, the beasts were never God’s crowning achievement of creation. There has always been a special relationship between God and humanity that the beasts have no part of. God loves all of His creation but saves a special love for humanity.

This is why, even when we marred God’s creation with sin and rebellion against His will, God still sought to redeem us from our own sin. The beasts faced the impact of our sin and will join humanity as a part of the new heavens and new earth God promises in Revelation 21. Solomon resolves his concerns over our return to dust stating in Ecclesiastes 12:7 that “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” The promise of the new heavens and new earth follows that time in which our mortal form returns to dust and our spirit returns to God. At this time, the vanity of our earthly struggles will be at an end.

Thoughts for Reflection

What do you most look forward to about our future life with God in heaven?

19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. 21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?