



KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7

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Ecclesiastes Chapter 7

Heavenly father as we consider parts of Ecclesiastes chapter 7 today, I ask that you calm our hearts and minds and that your Holy Spirit restores us.

As I read through Ecclesiastes, I came away feeling depressed...with some glimmer of hope. Meaningless, meaningless says the writer utterly meaningless everything is meaningless.

From time to time I find myself with a young depressed client who tells me that their life is meaningless, they tell me that all of life is meaningless. Now in a world without God, their argument is a good one. If there is no God, if we are just chance happenings in time and space, then my client is right - we have no meaning and life is meaningless.

We can of course create some sort of meaning for ourselves...but at best it is no more than a delusion... Because in a world without God we amount to nothing more than a nanoparticle, a blip in time and space.

When I was about 8 years of age my parents separated, later divorcing. Apart from the necessities of sharing a young child there was very little communication between them. By the time I was 12 I don't think they had any need to talk to each other again.

It was probably 25 to 30 years after they had separated that my maternal grandmother was in hospital and it was thought that she would die. So, my mother thought she should go and visit her mother. When she got there my grandmother had another visitor. My mother asked my grandmother if she would introduce her to the other visitor...the other visitor was my father. Eighteen years of sleeping in the same bed, 25 to 30 years later and my mother did not recognise my father. My mother rang to tell me what had happened and I could tell by her voice that she didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

Meaningless says the teacher utterly meaningless everything is meaningless.

It has been said the book of Ecclesiastes is like the Christian looking inside the mind of the atheist; it's like a Christian looking inside of the mind of the person who does not believe in God. As I read Ecclesiastes it is like the author of this wisdom literature knows about God but he also is well acquainted with life without God. There seems to be a tension.

It's been said Ecclesiastes is about life, not under God, not under Jesus, but life under the sun, *s, u, n*. At the same time the author of this wisdom cannot hold back his moments of looking to God, and that of course is where the hope is.

In Chapter 1 he tries study and wisdom; they just lead to sorrow. So, he tests out pleasure and, when overloaded with partying, he concludes this is foolish, so he loses himself in work, but this brings despair and anxiety, pain and grief; he decides this too is meaningless.

In Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 we see other themes of dissatisfaction. It seems the writer tries or observes the ways of the world and he finds it doesn't give satisfying answers.

It seems the writer is often trying to work out life under the sun, rather than life under God. There seems a lostness in his writing, it's like he needs the map; he needs the script; he needs the blueprint for life.

How's this for the blueprint for life and I quote, 'We are made by God, we are made for God, we are made to be reconciled to God, and we are made to be greatly used by God for eternal consequences.' Now there's some meaning for you!

This morning we're to look at Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 and I will pick out some verses to try to illustrate what I am saying.

Ch7:1 'A good name is better than fine perfume'. Donald Trump has a good name; it was good enough to get him elected as president of the United States of America. But there are probably some here who would prefer the fine perfume. Mother Teresa had a good name, though there was a woman who wrote critically about her.

‘A good name is better than fine perfume’ but if we jump down to verse 28, the writer says, ‘I found one upright man among a thousand and not one upright woman among them all’... The point is no one seems upright. Living under the sun, there are no upright men or women.

Then in the next verse, verse 29, ‘This only had I found: God made people upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.’

So how do we find the person with the ‘good name that is better than fine perfume’?

I want to suggest we apply the blueprint God gives us for life. The person living under God, working hard at living as God requires, that’s the good name that is better than fine perfume. Better than fine perfume is the name of the woman or the man who knows they were made by God, made for God, made to be reconciled to God, and made to be greatly used by God for eternal consequences...and is living accordingly.

Friends what about you today...do we find you sitting under God’s blueprint or do we find you wandering off in search of one of those many schemes.

If you are wandering off then listen to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Proverbs 9: ‘...fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’. Job 28 ‘...fear of the Lord - this is wisdom.’ And as you will see in weeks to come in Ecclesiastes Chapter 12, ‘Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man, for God will bring every deed into judgement including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil.’

I had lunch with a couple of friends about six weeks ago; one of them was saying how lovely it was to be a Christian and to experience ‘the peace and the love of God and those sorts of things...’ ‘Do you mean things like the fear of God?’ I replied.

Come back to Ecclesiastes Chapter 7; look at v1b and 2: ‘The day of death is better than the day of birth’...‘It is better to go to a house of

mourning than to go to the house of feasting for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart’.

Death...it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for death is the destiny of every man.

We put on an 80th birthday lunch for my father, who was quite tottery by that stage and cognitively not that with it. Not dead but on the way out. A couple who over the years had been very good friends to my father and his wife (in fact it was through this couple that they met) were invited to the lunch. Part way through the lunch I remember looking at my father’s friend and thinking, ‘He will never be back. You could see in his face that there was nothing left for him to enjoy in his friendship with my father. When my father died, my father’s wife attempted to ring them for many months, leaving messages on the phone and for many months they did not answer. It seemed that the good times were more important to them than the house of mourning.

How would God want us to treat the person who is mourning. Very simply, love and comfort them. No, the house of morning is not fun, it may be distressing, it may bring tears to your eyes but if you do well it is likely to be far more satisfying than going to a party.

The verse goes on to say, ‘death is the destiny of every person; the living should take this to heart’. Those under the sun and those under God would no doubt agree that death is the inevitable destiny of every person. For those under the sun it may well raise questions for them about why are we here, what was this life about and where do we go after we die. For those under God they know that after death comes judgement and for those in Christ, life.

At a church I went to in the past a young boy in the youth group (he would have been about 13) went on a camp his Scripture teacher had organised. During the camp he made a commitment to follow Jesus. It was a week or two after the camp and he was riding his pushbike. He rode around the corner and into the back of the garbage truck and was decapitated. The non-Christian principal of his high school was there at the funeral and he said to me afterwards how inspired he was by the

funeral of this Christian boy. For those under God, death is not the end, it is only the end of the first few minutes of a very long life.

Friends we don't need to fear death; we can fear pain, we can fear the loss of a loved one, but we don't need to fear death if we are in Christ. I think it was a sermon I was reading on this verse by the long dead preacher B. B. Warfield who said something like this: we should be looking forward to death because this is our destiny, this is what God in Christ has prepared us for.

So, you oldies stay focused; a comfortable retirement is not the goal; death and what lies beyond is the goal for those of us in Christ. Death will certainly be my next big milestone. The question for me, and you, is how should fear of the Lord, how should wisdom, determine how we live in the meantime?

Let's have a look at 7:13: 'Consider what God has done: who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy: but when times are bad consider: God has made the one as well as the other.'

We do have to live under the sun, we live in a fallen world that's twisted out of shape by sin. But then onto this twisted world we have to overlay God's blueprint. We can't change God's plan; he will have his way; he is saving himself a people, you and I, but we will have to suffer the effects of a sinful world whilst we wait for him to complete his plan.

So, there will be times when things seem good and we will be happy but there will be times when things are not good, when they are bad, and we will have to tolerate the discomfort that goes with that. But be assured that God loves you and he is faithful even when we are unfaithful and he is working out his plan to bring us to him through Jesus' death and resurrection. In the mean time we can explore how to be greatly used by God for eternal consequences.

v23 'All this I tested by wisdom and I said, I am determined to be wise – but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it was far off and most profound – who can discover it?' It seems he has forgotten God.

It is suggested that the wisdom in Ecclesiastes is a Solomon like collection written by somebody else, likely well after Solomon's death. If this is Solomon speaking it is interesting because he was said to be such a wise King. When he became King, he asked God for wisdom and he was known for his wisdom under the sun.

There was, though, another side to Solomon. His lack of wisdom. It seemed he forgot God's blueprint. He married the daughter of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. But the Israelites were not to go back to the land of their slavery, Egypt; he would have known that. He was not to marry a foreigner or make alliances with other nations; he would have known that. He is doing all this by marrying Pharaoh's daughter.

Before he builds a temple for God, he offers sacrifices to God in 'high places'; these are the places where the worship of false gods took place. He was not sacrificing in low places as he should, but in the places and in the way the nations around approached their gods. He eventually builds the Temple for Israel's worship, where the people of Israel would meet with God, the King of Kings. But he then builds a palace for himself that is bigger and grander. The King of King's gets this one but Solomon the King...he gets a bigger one.

To my mind his structural legacy, his leadership, the example he set, seems to have begun the demise of the people of God. The legacy Solomon left appears to have begun the rot that lead to God's judgement on the people of Israel, their expulsion from the land of 'milk and honey' and generations in exile. For example, read 1 Kings 11. *Also see Exodus 34:11-16 & Deuteronomy 7:1-4.*

Solomon forgot the fear of the Lord, the beginning and arguably the end of wisdom.

At the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24-27 we read Jesus saying this, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a **wise person** who builds his house on the rock..."

Who is wise...? the person who hears what Jesus has to say, thinks about it and then puts it into practice. What is the wisdom we are to put into practice according to Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount? It's things like this:-

If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn the other also...

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret...

If you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your father will not forgive your sins...

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat and drink, or about your body, what you will wear (or about Covid). Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air - they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Friends this is wisdom! Turn away from living by the wisdom you find under the sun with its values, fears and expectations. Accept what God has done for you in Jesus, his death and resurrection, and begin a new life, living not by the wisdom you find under the *s,u,n* but by the wisdom you find under the Son of God, Jesus. And remember the blueprint.

Also see 1 Corinthians 1-2

How are Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, and 1 Corinthians 1-2 similar?

