

Sermon Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15; Revelations 21: 1-6

**Theme: “God has made everything suitable for its time” (Ecclesiastes 3: 11).**

The book of Ecclesiastes is believed by scholars to be written by King Solomon, King David’s son, who was king in Jerusalem (v.1). King Solomon was particularly well known for his ‘wisdom’.

Here, Solomon is reflecting on life as a whole from the moment that a person is born to the time they die.

I will begin by looking at four points.

**1. Firstly, the message that comes through strong is that “Life not centred on God is purposeless and meaningless”**

That is, you can have the whole world, but if God is not part of your life, then, everything that you will do will have absolutely no meaning whatsoever.

Jesus put it in this way in Mark 8 :35 “For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. 36 Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! 37 There is nothing you can give to regain your life”.

So, that is simply the first point, ‘life without God is meaningless’, as Solomon realises as he reflects on his life, now that he has become an old man.

**2. Secondly, King Solomon gives a powerful and an important personal Testimony to this reality, that life without God is useless.**

Listen to what Solomon says in the beginning of Ecclesiastes 1: 2:

“It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless”.

[Not a bad sentence: four ‘uselesses’ in the one sentence].

Life is useless, all useless, He says:

3 You spend your life working, labouring, and what do you have to show for it? 4  
Generations come and generations go, but the world stays just the same... 8  
Everything leads to weariness.....

Ecclesiastes 2:1 Solomon continues:

1. I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is. But I found that this is useless, too. 2 I discovered that laughter is foolish, that pleasure does you no good.

3 Driven on by my desire for wisdom, I decided to cheer myself up with wine and have a good time. I thought that this might be the best way people can spend their short lives on earth.

4 I accomplished great things. I built myself houses and planted vineyards. 5 I planted gardens and orchards, with all kinds of fruit trees in them; 6 I dug ponds to irrigate them.

7 I bought many slaves, and there were slaves born in my household. I owned more livestock than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem. 8 I also piled up silver and gold from the royal treasuries of the lands I ruled. Men and women sang to entertain me, and I had all the women a man could want.

9 Yes, I was great, greater than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem, and my wisdom never failed me. 10 Anything I wanted, I got. I did not deny myself any pleasure. I was proud of everything I had worked for, and all this was my reward.

In short, Solomon had it all; all the pleasures of life were at his figure tips. "I did not deny myself any pleasure" said Solomon; I had it all, I did it all, he says.

But,

11 Then [said Solomon] I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn't mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind - of no use at all.

That is, after all that he had achieved and accomplished, after living life to the full with all his wealth and fame and fortune, he could only come to the conclusion that all of this was of no use at all; meaningless.

In other words, he comes to conclusion that life without God is useless and meaningless.

### **3. Thirdly, Solomon comes to realise that he must accept his limitations in life.**

As he further examines and reflects on life as a whole, he discovers that human wisdom, even that of a godly person, has limits or is limited. He sees that as humans, we often run around vainly pursuing hopes and expectations that in reality are 'meaningless', 'a

chasing after the wind'. We should therefore simply 'accept' our limitations and not stress ourselves out, trying to reach or achieve what cannot have.

Of course our biggest problem, stemming from Adam and Eve, or the original sin, is that we want to be 'like' God; that is, having the ability to be 'more than human' (flesh). When Adam and Eve discovered that they were 'naked', they hid from God; they were ashamed and embarrassed of their 'humanity' for it was 'limited'; that is, it was not like God. We don't want this type of body; we want to be like God, they say in effect.

The story of the tower of Babel; again, highlights 'man' wanting to be like God; wanting to build a tower to the heavens. They were not content to live on earth, or ground level; no, they wanted to build high above the sky to be like God, hence, why God had to cut them down; made them speak in different languages and dispersed them all over the world.

Solomon realised that we cannot be like God. We must accept that we are 'human', not divine beings like God, and therefore, we must live under God's conditions. That is, our freedom comes by understanding and living within our limitations or the boundaries that God has set. Yes, we often want to transcend or go beyond these earthly boundaries, but we cannot, as Solomon discovered; we cannot, and so we must stop trying, as all efforts to try and do this will come to waste – it will all be meaningless.

The two examples I have used in the past is the example of a train and fish in bowl.

A train is free when it sticks to the rails or its tracks. When it tries to 'run' outside the tracks, outside its boundaries, it will only lead to derailment and destruction.

Same as the fish; the fish is free as long as it stays within the bowl or the tank. As soon as it tries to live outside the 'tank' it will die.

So, too with our lives. We are free to live on earth according to God's Commandments. As soon as we try to live according to our own rules and regulations, chaos will arise leading to destruction and ultimately death.

So, we must accept our limitations and live within God's commandments.

#### **4. Fourthly, Solomon, after accepting his limitations, comes to understand that "God has made all things beautiful or suitable for its time".**

Solomon comes to understand, through 'faith', [even though it took him nearly his whole life time to recognise it] that God has ordered all things according to his own purposes and in his own time. And meaning and purpose in life comes only when we accept our

limitations and when we begin to see and understand just how God has ordered everything under heaven according to his plan and to his timing.

**“God has made everything suitable or beautiful for its time”  
(Ecclesiastes 3: 11).**

14. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.

And, because of this fact, that everything revolves around God’s time, Solomon, therefore, argues that we should be patient and enjoy life as God gives it.

He says that we should be prudent and wise in everything we do, ensuring that we live carefully before God and, above all, fearing God and keeping his commandments.

As he says in Ecclesiastes 12:13 “After all this, there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God [fear God], and obey his commands, because this is all that we were created for.

## **5. What are the implications of our reading for this morning for us as Church as we begin a new year?**

Firstly, we must never forget that life without God is meaningless, a mere chasing after the wind. We can have the best strategic plans, the best programs, the best plan for the year 2012, but if God is not part of all that we do, then, it will all be useless.

Secondly, we must heed and learn from the testimony given by Solomon. He had everything; wisdom, gold, money, women, power, he engaged in large building and agricultural projects; he had slaves and so on and on, but, yet he discovered that without God in His life, all of this was absolutely useless.

If you are wanting more money, more wealth in 2012, beware, as Solomon’s testimony makes clear, that you can have all the wealth in the world, like he did, but at the end of the day, if God is not in your life, you will find that life with all the money in the world is useless, meaningless; a waste of time.

What will be your testimony when you come to the end of your life on earth? Will you conclude your life by saying that all that you have done was useless? Or, will it be a time of Joy and thanksgiving to God for all that He has done?

Thirdly, we are reminded that we are ‘humans’, NOT God; we are limited and must accept our limitations. This may sound obvious, but again, as mentioned last week, if

you sit down and reflect on your life and the way you live your life, you may be surprised to find out that you are actually living a life as if you are 'god'; that is, living a life according to your own rules and your regulations; living a life according to how you want and not how God wants. When you live life for yourself, you are actually making yourself a 'god', that is, the centre and focus for that all happens around you.

We are 'limited' in what we can and cannot do. We cannot transcend our humanity. We must simply 'accept' our limitations as God's appointments. We must understand the real freedom comes in the fear of the Lord and in obeying God's commands; living a life for God, and not for the 'self'.

And, fourthly, when we accept our limitations, we will come to see just how wonderfully God has made everything suitable and beautiful in its times.

Everything revolves around God's time.

As Solomon said, 14. "I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him".

May 2012 be the Year of the Lord! May we seek to do God's will and His will alone. May all that happens in accordance with his will, good and bad, positive and negative enable us simply to stand in awe at Him, and may all our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, be to Him and him alone.

And, [Jude 1: 24] Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Happy New Year to you all!