

SERMON 14th FEBRUARY 2021
Ecclesiastes 3: 9-14

Friends:

When “all is said and done” what is the “point” of all I have said and done?

- It sounds “fatalistic”!
- It sounds anything in the world but “biblical”!
- If you said this in church you might well get a “lecture”!
- “But” you are “not” King Solomon and he “can” ask questions like that!
- Verse 9:
“What do workers “gain” from their “toil”?”
- Solomon really “does” want an “answer” for his questions?
- Does “all” this “effort” make a difference?
- Solomon poses a fair question.
- If God controls the peaks and valleys of life, if He has it all covered, then what is the point of “MY” work?
- Why should I even “bother” to punch in on time when tomorrow morning rolls around?
- We have all known friends or acquaintances to spend 20 or 30 years “building” a secure home for their families “only” to see it quickly evaporate through some disaster or financial crisis!
- Were all those years a total “waste”?
- Solomon “faces” this attitude of futility and despair “head on” in Verses “10 and 11”!
- “I have seen the “burden” God has laid on the human race. He has made “everything beautiful” in its time. He has also set “eternity” in the human heart; yet “no” one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end!”

Friends:

Our busy work and hectic lifestyle can “obscure” the true meaning of life “unless” we stop” and take a “close look”!

- When we “slow down” and consider God’s “big picture” we will “realize” that God’s plan is “good”!
- The “truth” is God has made everything “BEAUTIFUL” in its time! **(V11)**
- “That is” that everything is beautiful in God’s sight; everything in life has a “purpose”!

Friends:

Life is “NOT” empty and random and godless; but “full” and “precisely aligned” and Go-
“ordained”!

- It’s “not” that your most “important work” is meaningless; it’s that you “most trivial” movements are “ALSO” “significant”!
- Ruth Bell Graham used to have an “inscription” over her kitchen “sink”:
“Divine service conducted HERE three times a day”!
- Ruth understood that whatever we do – even washing a “dirty pot” – is worthwhile; if done in God’s “will” and for Christ’s “glory”!
- The apostle Paul “tells us so whether you “eat” or “drink” or “whatever you do” do it all for the glory of God!”

(1 Cor. 10:31)
- One man who understood this well was Nicholas Herman, otherwise known in history as “Brother Lawrence” (1614-1691)!
- He was born in France, fought for the French army, was seriously wounded and was lame for the rest of his life. However, he always had a nagging “fear” of living an insignificant life!
- At age 50 he joined a monastery in Paris where he was “dubbed” Brother Lawrence!
- He was “assigned” to the “kitchen”, he was insulted and humbled! For the next several years, he went about his ‘chores’; miserable but dutiful!
- Then one day he began thinking about his “attitude”!
- He started reminding himself that God’s “presence” continually permeated him!
- Even the most menial tasks, if undertaken for God’s glory, are “holy”!

Friends:

That means the heat of the kitchen, the sweat of the field, the mess of the toddlers home, the 5 hours of our op shop, even the stench of the gutter are “HOLY GROUND” “because” God goes there with us”!

- So many years passed; Brother Lawrence countenance and demeanor gradually change, “until” others began asking him a “reason” for his “radiance”!
- You can read all about his answer in a book titled “The Practice of the Presence of God”!
- Brother Lawrence’s “simple message” had a worldwide impact, because He understood the full implications of God’s “invisible presence”!

- One of his quotes says:
“Think often of God, by day, by night, in your business, and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave Him not alone!”

Friends:

Do you have the pleasing “aroma” of Christ?

- Do you “smell” of Christ?
- Are people “asking” you “why” you are shining with something different?
- Solomon goes on in Verse 11 to add his beautiful sentence:
“He has made “everything” “beautiful” in its time!”
- How “good to know” that “everything”, the good, the bad, the ugly; in our lives has a God-ordained “purpose”!
- God is “for us”, “not” against us!
- Everything in our lives goes through God’s “filter” of love and mercy!
- This verse is the Old Testament counterpart of Romans 8:28:
“ We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!”

Friends:

We have “no” problem connecting with Verse 11 in the nice moments of life!

- What sets the “true believer” apart is his or her “ability” to “apply” it during “times of unpleasantness”!
- “Young couples” fall in love and get married. They are convinced that God has made everything beautiful in His time! But 10 years later, when little children are underfoot, bills are due, a job has been lost and a medical scare has been diagnosed – we “wonder” what happened to all that beauty!
- Men and women “leave their marriages” in times like these simply because they are unaware of God’s presence in the rugged times as well as the smooth.

Friends:

Our challenge as Christians is to recognize that everything has a time, a season a reason, and to “trust God” to bring sense and unity on His “schedule”!

- Are you “only” a “fair-weather” Christian?
- “Storms” will always “come” into the Christian’s life!

- The apostle Paul says to Timothy:
“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be “persecuted”!”
(2 Tim. 3:12)
- Malcolm Muggeridge who became a committed follower of Christ after being an “atheist” in his youth, wrote this in his book, “A Twentieth Century Testimony”:
“Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially “desolating and painful” with particular “satisfaction”!”

“Indeed I can say with complete truthfulness that everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through “affliction” and not through happiness! This, of course, is what the cross signifies. And it is the cross more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ!”
- E. M. Bounds was an American civil-war era devotional writer who focused mainly on “prayer”!
- He penned this little poem:
*“Why should I fear tomorrow?
The LORD directs my way.
Why should I trouble borrow?
I live but for today.
Whenever I am weary, in God I find my rest.
And when my path seems dreary, I know it’s for the best”!*
- Of course this is where “faith” comes into play!
- We walk by faith not by sight!
(2 Cor. 5:7)
- If you faith works only when everything is “rosy and upbeat”, it’s not worth very much!
- Faith kicks in when the roof falls in!
- We keep up our spirits and fortify ourselves by “trusting” in God’s presence and promises despite “dismal” and circumstances!
- We “believe” God only has good plans for his children; and that “includes” even the negative things that come into our lives!
- But what about the Holocaust? What about 9/11? What about the 80+ homes lost in the Perth Hills bushfire?
- I can’t answer all those questions on suffering!
- “But” I can say that God doesn’t turn a blind eye to “suffering”!

- Now one of the most famous verses in all the Bible (**V11**):
“And He has put “eternity” in the human heart!”
- “Don Richardson” wrote an award winning book called “ETERNITY in their HEARTS” based on this verse! He presented more than 25 examples of cultures all over the world, completely cut off from Christianity in which fragments of truth about God existed!
- The people were “looking” for God, indeed “hungry” for God, since knowledge about God in some form had been passed down over the generations!
- In most cases leading them to Christ required little effort! God came to earth in Christ and was searching for “them” to bring forgiveness of sins!
- Richardson set forth the idea that every human being has ETERNITY in his or her heart! And that winning people to Christ is a matter of discovering what piece or part of eternity they were familiar with and connecting the dots to Christ!

Friends:

God Almighty has put “something in your heart”: no one misses out! A taste for longing for “eternity”, and it cannot be discovered through the things of life!

- There will always be a longing for something “more” in “your life” until you “know God personally”!
- And even when you come to know God in Christ, there will still be an “ache”, for the Bible says the whole creation of “groaning”, waiting for the final days of redemption!
(Rom. 8:22)
- Even as believers in our Risen Lord Jesus, we will never find ultimate satisfaction in this life “BECAUSE” we were made for “ETERNITY”!
- The “BEST” is yet to “come”!
- “C. S. Lewis” in his classic Mere Christianity said it this way:
*“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exist.
A “baby” feels hunger, well there is such a thing as food!
Humans feel sexual desire, well there is such a thing as sex!
If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was “made for another world”! Earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, “but” only arouse it, to suggest he real thing!”*
- I wonder if Saint Augustus had (**V11**) in mind when he wrote:
“You have made us for Yourself, restless is our heart until it come to rest in You!”
- The “unrest” we see in our world and in our own hearts tells us we have not found our rest “completely” in God!
- And we won’t fully experience that rest completely until we enter the realm for which we were created – “ETERNTIY”!

- The apostle Paul puts it like this:
“For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in “part”, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known!”
(1 Cor. 13:12)

Friends:

We’re squinting in a “god”; peering through a “mist”! It’s like driving up Mt Ousley or Bulli Pass and suddenly the fog descends. You can’t see anything clearly anymore – I find it quite frightening.

- “But” it won’t be long before the weather clears and the “sun” shines bright.
- We’ll see it all then, see it as clearly as God sees us, “knowing Him’ directly just as He knows us!
- Once again C. S. Lewis’s words help us:
“Our Heavenly Father has provided many delightful “inns” for us along our journey: but He takes great care to see that we do not mistake any of them for home!”
- Yes we “enjoy” many stops along the journey of life but we can only “wonder” about the “mansions” in Heaven He is preparing for You and Me!
- The “second half” of Verse 11 is an interesting twist!
- “YET “no one” can fathom what God has done from beginning to end!”
- God’s plan is always good! His purpose is clear!
- But **(V11)** tells us that His program is “mysterious”!
- No body can figure it out!
- God is a mysterious God at times!
- I “don’t” understand everything that god is doing in his World!
- I often “wish” God would be more “forth coming” with the answers!
- The evangelist “Vance Havner” used to say:
“God writes over some of our days: “Will explain later”!”
- Catherine Marshall wrote this after the death of her grandchild:
“When life hands us situations we cannot understand, we have one or two choices. We can “wallow” in misery, separated from God. Or we can tell Him; “I need You and Your Presence in my life “more” than I need understanding. I choose You Lord. I trust You to give me understanding and an answer to all of my “whys”, only if and when You “choose”!”

- Deuteronomy 29:29 says:
“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us!”

Friends:

God is God and He does not owe us every answer to every question or demand!

- Right now we live by “faith” and peer through a glass darkly!
- Will you trust in God “not” knowing all the answers?
- God “loves” us with an infinite and perfect love demonstrated at the “cross”! God is for us not against us, what more could we want?
- Verses 12 to 13:
I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live! That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil – “this is the gift of God”!

Friends:

You enter the world’s greatest amusement park! You have the whole day to spend there! Which amazing roller coaster will you ride first?

- “None”! You sit on the bench, pull out a laptop computer, and dedicate yourself to computing the precise mechanical configurations of every attraction! You figure that mastery of the nuts and bolts will enhance the roller-coaster experience!
- Eight hours later, it is time to go home!
- The laptop is humming – but you “haven’t” experienced a “single thrill”!
- This is what happens in life when we become preoccupied with “looking over” God’s shoulder!
- You will “never” understand even a small portion of God’s program, so you might as well enjoy a larger portion of His provisions!
- If God tried to explain the science of providential mechanics, it would be like you trying to explain your job to a flea!
- “Life” – the awesome gift of God – should not be afflicted by the “paralysis of analysis”!
- We will be either frozen in “fear” over what comes next or so confused over the meaning of it all that we will not notice the joy leaking out through the seams of everyday living!
- As “believers” in our glorious God there comes a time for “lighten up” a bit, as people sometimes say!
- Do we take God, His Word, and His Laws any less seriously? “Not at all”!

- We simply acknowledge the “boundaries” defined by God’s “greatness” and our “smallness”!

Friends:

God “cannot” be put into any convenient “box” of our design!

- The Eternal One says in Isaiah 55:9:
“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than yours and my thoughts than your thoughts!”
- “God moves in a mysterious way His wonder to perform”, hymn writer William Cowper wrote!
- Some people want to master every corner of the God question “before” they make a commitment to believe in Him, “BUT” they “miss” the heart of the issue: the issue of the “sinful heart”!
- Jesus said:
I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly!
(Jh. 10:19)
- Jesus uses a great Old Testament “word” to describe the way God wants to bless you!
- God “abundantly” pardons our sins!
(Is. 55:7)
- Psalm 37:11 promises us an abundance of “peace”!
- 1 Timothy 1:14 His “grace” is exceedingly abundant!
- We have abundant “labors” in God’s Kingdom (2 Cor. 11:23) but also abundant “joy”!
(Phili. 1:26)
- I “think” when most Christians approach the end of life, they are going to wish they had served God more faithfully!
- But I think they will have another “regret” as well: that they did not fully take advantage of the wonderful abundance in life that “Christ offers us”!
- Our God “enjoys” our “enjoyment”!
- God “filled” the world with “good” things!
- Go to the Opera!
- Go to the Art Gallery!
- Go for a hike in the bush!

- Watch a surprise!
- Spend time with your family!
- Take a holiday or a mini-break away!
- Pursue an enjoyable hobby!
- Relax in a sauna!
- Sit and read a book!
- It's "OK" to do something for "yourself" and thank God for the blessings He has abundantly poured into your life!
- Author "Jim McGuigan" has observed: "Some saints can't enjoy a meal because the world is starving. They can't joyfully thank God for their clothing and shelter because the world is naked and homeless!"
- They can't enjoy an evening at home with family because they feel they ought to be out saving souls!
- They can't spend an hour with a non-believer without feeling guilty if they haven't preached a sermon or shared Jesus in some way!
- Some saints "know" nothing of "balance"!
- And they're "miserable" because of it!
- Many "believers" think the "gospel" is "GOOD NEWS" until you obey it and then it becomes an endless "GUILT-TRIP"!
- Our Westminster Catechism says:
"Man's chief and highest end is to GLORIFY God, and fully ENJOY Him, forever!"

Friends:

Is your greatest JOY in life enjoying God?

- "John Piper" sums up his life's ministry like this:
"God is most glorified in us; "when" we are most satisfied in Him!"
- We all spontaneously "praise" whatever we "value".
- Are you "spontaneously" praising God?
- Verses 13 & 14:
"That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil – this is the gift of God! I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear Him!"

Friends:

As believers enjoy all the things in life that God provides for us!

- Sometimes God gives plenty, other time just enough!
- The apostle Paul said:
"I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances, I know how to live humbly and I know how to abound!"
(2 Cor. 8: 11-12)
- At all times we need to be "thankful" to God for all His gifts to us!
- Optimistic people see blessings amid burdens!
- We must look at life through the glasses of God's "promises": which magnify "BLESSINGS" and keep "trials" in perspective!
- God deals exclusively in forever and flawless!
- If God made it, you can't add to it, subtract from it, or put a stop to it!
- God's work is always a master-piece, a work of perfection!
- God's sunset is a work of perfection! I simply stand before it humble and speechless!

Friends:

God's design for your life is every bit as "awe-inspiring" as tomorrow's sunset!

- God's plan for your life is to become more and more Christ like! The process will be different for each one of us!
- How do we correctly "respond" to God's perfect work in our lives? We respond with a healthy "fear of God"!
- This fear of God is caught up in love! It is a fear that inspires worship! We fear the thunderous power of a love so relentless it could send One's Own Son to "die"!
- The "importance" of this life is that it determines "eternity"! Where will you spend eternity?

Let's Pray