

SERMON 31st JANUARY 2021
Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

Friends:

Tennis champion “Hana Mandlikova” was once asked how she felt about defeating players like Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert Lloyd.

- She replied:
“Any big win means that all the suffering, practicing and travelling are worth it! I feel like I own the world!”
- When asked “How long” that feeling lasts, she replied:
“About 2 minutes!”
- We live in a world “searching” for fleeting, momentary flashes of “satisfaction”!
- “Derek Ratcliffe”, British environmentalist and keen social critic, wrote a compelling analysis of Western television audience and viewing habits!
- He spoke of the mindless shallow hedonism that seems to be the way our society is heading” a restless search for instant gratifications, trivial and short-lived pleasures that leave “no” lasting satisfaction!
- “TV appears” to be “feeding”, rather than “following” this “trend”.
- Come of us get off the couch to go to “work”!
- We know we “cannot” satisfy the soul with non-stop entertainment, but we expect a good dose of the Christian work ethic to fill the bill!
- Solomon says “Not so fast!”

Friends:

Our “work” does not “satisfy us”!

- Verse 12:
“Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly!” What more can the King’s successor do than what has already been done?”
- Few people have “more” professional accomplishments than Solomon had!
- He “excelled” as a politician, a public leader, and educator, a zoologist, a biologist, and an economist!
- You name it, Solomon “did it”!
- “But” when Solomon took a step back from his work, viewed it “objectively”, and “evaluated it”: he was “disappointed”!
- It left him without any sense of permanent happiness.

- Solomon “complained” that when he surveyed all that his hands had done, everything was meaningless, nothing was gained under the sun! **(2:11)**

Friends:

We plunge into our careers with the adrenaline of a diver off a high board; dreaming of “influence and impact” – of making a “splash” for all to see!

- We want to be the “BEST in the game”!
- We want to be the best in “our generation”!
- We want to be “recognized” as “pacesetters”!
- It’s not just well known athletes, like Hana Mandlikova, who are “disillusioned”!
- Listen to an “ordinary person”:
“I’m a single parent, working full time, so juggling work, home and my social life: “placed me on a treadmill” that left me unfulfilled, drained and powerless! I could not see how else to live my life!”

Friends:

“Mobile phones”, “social media” and the relentless pursuit of “emails” have “blurred” the lines between “work and home”!

- “Home” is no longer a “refuge” but an extension of the “office”!
- Work “doesn’t” satisfy life’s “deepest” needs.
- It “didn’t” in Solomon’s day!
- It has “not since”; and it “never will”!
- Verses 13 to 16 reveal that our work eventually reduces us all to the “same level”!
- Verse 16:
“For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must “die”!”
- Now “Solomon” “astonishes us” with his “conclusion”: He claims that when we see things only as they are “under the sun”, we discover that all our work “neither: satisfies nor separates us, it reduces us all to the “same level”!
- “Imagine” for yourself a life of relentless, bone-wearing work! The “man” in the next cubicle puts in a career of lazy “underachievement”!
- The “two” of you “die” on the same day and are laid out in the “same funeral home”.
- ‘No stranger’ could view both bodies and identify which was the “go-getter” and which was the “slacker”!

- Job says:
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there!”
(Job 1:21)
- “Harry Ironside”, who pastored Moody Church in Chicago from 1929-1948, said:
“Death is the great leveler of all men. Whether rich or poor, wise or foolish, powerful or weak, renowned or obscure – no one can rise above it, cheat it, or escape its eventual claim on his life!”
- Verse 13:
“I saw that “wisdom” is better than “folly”; just as light is better than “darkness”!”

Friends:

“Wisdom” has value!

- Solomon “encourages” us to seek “wisdom”!
- “Wisdom” is like light to a man walking!
- Later on Solomon tells us to possess wisdom for it will give “success”!
(Ecc. 10:10)
- Wisdom will preserve life and protect it!
(Ecc. 7:12)
- Wisdom will give strength!
(Ecc. 7:19)
- Man is “guided” by “wisdom”!
(Ecc. 2:3)
- Man “toils” by wisdom!
(Ecc. 2:21)
- Man tests and weighs “experiences” by wisdom!
(Ecc 7:23)
- “Limited” wisdom may be but it is still “indispensable” for life in a fallen world!

Friends:

“Earthly wisdom” can get us so far, for eternal life we need “wisdom from Heaven”!

- Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:30 need to be studied and remembered:
“It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus, who have become for us “wisdom” from God: that is, our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption!”

Friends:

Want true everlasting wisdom? It’s “only found” in the Lord Jesus!

- Jesus makes us “right” with God!
- Jesus makes us “holy” in God’s sight!
- Jesus “redeems” us from our old self-centered sinful life!

Friends:

Is “Jesus Christ” your “Wisdom” from God? Is Jesus Christ your “sufficiency?”

- Verse 14:
“The “wise” have eyes in their heads, while the “fool” walks in the darkness; but I cam to realize that the same fate overtakes them both!”
- “Wisdom” is light and it is God’s gift to us, as man’s possession it is spiritual sight!
- The “fool”, whom we meet here for the first time, is notorious for his babbling, his drunkenness, his tendency to evil, one of whom wickedness is fun!
(Pr. 10:23)
- The fool has more interest in his own pursuits than in wisdom.
(Pr. 18:2)
- The fool takes delight in airing their own opinions!
- The fool has no light from God, no spiritual eyes to see the truth!
- The fool prefigures the New Testament sinner who loves darkness (*Jh. 3:19*) and is darkness! (*Eph. 5:8*)

Friends:

As a “cure” for the ultimate problem of life; “wisdom” is “useless”: both the wise man and the fool “succumb” to “death”!

- Verse 15:
“Then I said to myself, the “fate” of the fool will overtake me also”!
- What then do I gain by being wise? I said to myself, “this too is meaningless”!

Friends:

What’s the “point” of being holy? What’s the point of being honest and loyal? What’s the point of prayer and repentance? What’s the point of being obedient if the “Christian” and “non-Christian” both have the “same end”?

- What happens to the “human” body” after 100 years inside a coffin?
- Just a few minutes after death your brain begins to break down. Its cells collapse and release water. Then other energy-guzzling organs follow!

- That night microbes eat through your gut and escape into the rest of your body!
- They release toxic gases that cause your body to bloat up and smell!
- Most of your tissues will probably liquefy!
- But thin skin, like your eyelids, could dry out and mummify, while fatty areas of your body can turn into a soap-like substance called grave wax!
- After 3 or 4 months your yellow green complexion has turned brownish-black because the iron inside your blood vessels spills out, becoming oxidized!
- After a year, your cotton clothes disintegrate! By 50 years your tissues will have liquefied and disappeared! After 80 years in that coffin your bones will crack as the soft collagen inside them deteriorates!
- After a century the last of your bones will have collapsed into dust! And only the most durable part of your body, your “teeth” will remain!
- What’s the point of life if we all end up as a “pair of teeth”?
- The “wise and the foolish” all end up as a “pair of teeth”!
- Verse 16:
“For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!”
- But we “know” as believers in the Risen Lord Jesus the grave is “not the end”!
- We will be with the Lord for all eternity!
- We won’t “need” that body in the grave where we are going, for God will give us a new body in Heaven that will be similar to Christ’s body after his “resurrection”!

*(Phil. 3:21)
(cf. 1 Cor. 15)*

Friends:

We will all “die” because of sin! We will all be “judged” according to our works!

(2 Cor. 5:10)

- We will all “appear” before the Judgment Seat of Christ!
- On that day if you stand before Christ trusting your “own goodness” you will fail!
- “However” if you stand before Christ trusting his “death” on your behalf you “will be saved”!
- Whom are “you” trusting for your eternal destiny?

- Verse 17:
“So I “hated” life, because the work that is done under the sun was “grievous” to me. All of it meaningless, a chasing after the wind!

Friends:

Our “work” does not succeed us!

- You may not appreciate hearing it, but Solomon is simply saying aloud what we all know to be true!
- Build what you want, save what you might, put it in the bank, liquefy it into stocks and bonds, drop it into real estate, place it anywhere you choose.
- You only “control” your “wealth” for a “season”!
- And then it’s “out of your hands” completely!
- As you draw your “last breath”, you withdraw your grip on all that you have “labored to build” under the sun!
- It’s a matter for “others now”!
- Hatred of “life” **(V7)** is followed by hatred of “fool”! **(V8)**
- “Work” must be “left behind” when we die; so what is the “point of it”?
- Solomon’s message here is that the “accumulation of wealth” doesn’t produce anything that “endures” through time and eternity!
- Leaving our loved ones “too much” might be worse than leaving them “too little”!
- Verse 19:
“And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish! Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun”
- This too is “meaningless”!
- French novelist, “Gaston Levoux”, creator of the Phantom of the Opera was almost destroyed in this way!
- When his father died suddenly, leaving him with a fortune of almost one million francs, Gaston abandoned his career and relaxed into a wasteful existence of gambling and pleasure in colourful Paris society!
- Within a year he had squandered his inheritance – another “prodigal son”!
(Lk. 15: 11-32)
- Solomon is “warning” us that accumulating “mountains of money” becomes MEANINGLESS to us within two seconds of death!

- “In fact”, the very reality of death strips your possessions of lasting significance!
- “William Lane”, a brilliant apologist, in his book “Reasonable Faith” describes the ultimate “implications” of “life” from the perspective of an “unbeliever”:
“I realize that I am going to die and forever cease to exist!”
- My life is just a momentary transition out of oblivion into oblivion!
- And the universe, too, faces death!
- Scientists tell us that the universe is expanding, and everything on it is growing farther and farther apart!
- As it does, it grows colder and colder and its energy is used up!
- Eventually all the stars will burn out and all matter will collapse into dead stars and black holes...
- Mankind is a doomed race in a dying universe!
- Because the human race will eventually cease to exist, it makes no ultimate difference whether it ever did exist!
- Mankind is thus no more significant than a swarm of mosquitoes or a barnyard of pigs, for their end is all the same!
- The same blind cosmic process that coughed them up in the first place will eventually swallow them all “again”!
- Who “cares” if we leave behind a dollar or two on the road to oblivion?
- Who “cares” if we leave millions of dollars for our children?
- That is why the apostle “Paul” tells us to set our affections on “things above”, “not” on things below!

(Col. 3: 1-4)
- That is why “Jesus” tells us to lay up treasures for ourselves in “heaven” not on earth!

(Matt. 6: 19-20)
- Martin Luther said:
“The LORD commonly gives riches to foolish people, to whom He gives nothing else!”
- “However” this is one of my favourite Luther quotes about money:
“God “divided” the hand into fingers so that “money” would slip through!”

- Paul writes these timeless words to Timothy - (1 Tim. 6: 17-19):

“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with “everything for our enjoyment!”

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share! In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is “truly life”!”

Friends:

May your greatest treasure be in Heaven: the “Lord Jesus” HIMSELF!

- One day all your things on earth will be left behind!
- Some time ago an aspiring television star was given a shot of a network series!
- He went to the studios, saw his name on a parking space, found the crew treating him like royalty and the series pilot was shot in 5 days but television executives “rejected it”!
- When the young actor left, no one said good-bye, the name was gone from the parking spot and his dressing room was locked!
- “All the success was like smoke”! He said. “I couldn’t get a handle on it, like fairy flow, once it was in y mouth it was gone!”

Friends:

Our culture is a fairy floss world – sugary and seductive – a pink swirl of empty calories!

- “Today” you might be the flavor of the month, with Fame and Fortune at your “command”!
- “Tomorrow” your pockets may be empty as your soul!
- So what is the “ANSWER”?
- Verses 24 & 25:
“A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own foil. This too, I see is from the “hand of God”, for “without God”, who can eat or find enjoyment?
- Solomon could have settled into a ‘spirit of cynicism’ about “life under the sun”!
- He could have lived out his days in “silent despair”!
- But he remembered something wonderful from his youth!
- He recalled when life was “simpler”! When he had much less and enjoyed it much more!

- Particularly, he remembered the message of two fathers: one who taught him from Heaven, the other who taught him of earth!
- These last few words of verse 25 are “KEY”!
- The New Living Translation renders V25 this way:
“For who can eat or enjoy anything “apart” from God?”
- That is Solomon’s “conclusion”:
“God is the essence of the positive life; and every moment of it is a “gift” from Him!”
- James tells us in “1:17-19” that every good and perfect gift is from “above”, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights!
- “Eight times” in this book we will hear this sentiment: a kind of upbeat refrain for the dirgelike verses of Ecclesiastes!

Friends:

Even under the sun; even with what is “missing”, what we do have is “still the gift of God”!

- The “wisdom”, the “work” and the “pleasure of a good meal” are no more than “appetizers”, but they are “good appetizers”!
- Yes we can enjoy our good homes and families, the pleasure of our recreation and sport, the chilled swim, and the juicy grilled steak!
- We can feel good in connecting with our work – paid or voluntary.
- These things will NEVER give us the one great pleasure that lies at the centre of life, but they will “complement” it!
- Some people think “God” is in His Heaven peering through the clouds to catch people having fun, so that He might stop them!
- The God of the Bible, the God of Ecclesiastes is “nothing” like that: God is the Joy giver, the dispense of pleasurable pursuits!
- Christ, the “Bread of Life”, leaves a little trail of good things like bread crumbs in the forest; leading straight to “joy” that is eternal: intimate fellowship with Jesus!
- Only after tasting that the Lord Jesus is good “do” these lesser tastes become truly pleasurable to us!

Friends:

We must keep God in the “middle” of our bank accounts; our possessions; and our portfolios!

- Picture your hands out in front of you, cupped together, palms up!

- In your open hands are all the things God has entrusted to you – money, cars, a home, furniture, everything!
- “All” of this is “His gift”!
- We are the “stewards”; and faithfulness is our responsibility!
- Our “hands” must “never close over the gifts”, but remain open so that God may use them as required and “refill” our hands!

Friends:

Are you a “generous” Christian?

- How will “you” use your gifts for Christ’s service in the church and in the community? (this year?)
- So often the human impulse is to “clutch and clench”!
- To close our fists “protectively”! We then find ourselves “facing limited” resources.
- How can God fill us when there is “no opening”?
- With open “hearts” and open “hands” we “understand” that God lacks no resources and neither will we!
- The “more of God” you discover and enjoy; the more you will find available!
- And in the end it’s not the gifts that bring the joy – but “God himself”!
- Let’s finish with Verse 26:
“For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a person who pleases God”!

Friends:

The New Testament clearly tells us we “cant please God” without “faith in Jesus Christ”! All our good deeds are like filthy rags in God’s sight! God looks at us and He sees the perfect life of Jesus! Through Jesus and only through Jesus, God gives us wisdom, knowledge and joy!

- “Mark Twain” expressed thoughts about the “meaningless of life” in view of man’s inevitable “death”, shortly before his death he wrote:

“A myriad of men are born; they labour and sweat and struggle.... they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. The release comes at last; the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them – and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; a world that will lament them a day and forget them forever!”

“For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from God?”

Let’s Pray