

The Life Giving Shepherd

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Date: 24 March 2024

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[0 : 0 0] We'll have your Bibles open at Ecclesiastes 12, and we've finally come to the end. Well, not finally. It's been a long series, but it's been a really good one.

My NIV says the conclusion of the matter. So we've come to the whole conclusion of the matter. And Ecclesiastes has been looking at everything under the sun.

It's looking at the world around us, trying to make sense of it. And what it looks at, what it sees, is that nothing much makes sense. This world is in flux.

It's never steady. It's always changing. Like a ship, like being at a ship at sea. You know, in the olden days, when people traveled by ship, and there's big sailboats, and these things would move from side to side, because nothing is on the ocean. It's all up and down.

The wind is blowing. And to find your bearing, to know which way to go, you've got to find something that is solid and fixed. But what would happen when they get off these ships after months at sea, they'd hit the land, and they would keep on doing this.

[1 : 0 9] The land is steady, but they feel like the land isn't steady. They can't find their footing. And it's a bit like that in the world around us.

That's what Ecclesiastes says the world around us is like. This world under the sun is unsteady. It's going to throw things at you, and you're going to constantly find it difficult to find your footing, to find peace, to find happiness, to find calm in this world that's shifting and changing, and nothing is settled, and everything is moving around.

For example, everything could be going okay. Wham! Out of the blue. Someone dies.

Someone gets sick. Someone has an affair. Or you slowly but surely get old, as we see, as we saw last week. Or there's relationships that die a slow death.

Or there's everyday struggles with housework. Or with our jobs and our family. But we need to feel steady. We need a center on which everything can make sense, in which we can get our bearings and work out how life works.

[2 : 2 4] And finally, Ecclesiastes gets there. After acknowledging all these bad things, everything that life throws at us, everything that we experience in life, it gets to the conclusion of the whole matter.

And here, he says, are some rock-solid, foundational things to hold onto that will help us to stand fast when the storms of life wash over us.

And there's three things that the text highlights for us that we're going to spend our time looking at. And that is God's Word, God's judgment, and God's shepherd. So those three things are highlighted in the text for us today.

That help us to hold on to something solid when the world seems to be shifting and changing and we don't know how to get our bearing. So the first thing we're going to look at is God's trustworthy Word.

God's trustworthy Word. The first thing the teacher wants us to hold onto is God's Word. He wants us to know God's Word is a sure compass that helps us reconnoiter the difficult times in life.

[3 : 29] So have a look at verse 9, 10, and 11, but I'll highlight verse 10 and 11. Not only was the teacher wise, verse 9, but also imparted knowledge to the people.

He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. And then verse 10, the teacher searched to find just the right words. And what he wrote was upright and true.

And these words of the wise are like goads that collected sayings like firmly embedded nails given by the one shepherd.

So God gives us words that are upright and true. So in a world that's topsy-turvy, upside down, that doesn't know right from wrong, truth from error, good from bad, boy from girl in our own lifetime, it's God's Word that establishes for us a firm foundation that can be trusted.

They're upright. They have integrity. They hold true. That means we can test them. We can test Him. And we know that He will be found utterly trustworthy.

[4 : 48] This is what Jesus says about His own words that He gives us to hold on to from John chapter 6. He says, The Spirit gives life. The flesh profits nothing.

Life comes from above, from the Spirit. The flesh, this world, the stuff that you've got in this world, doesn't count for anything, doesn't give you anything, doesn't give you any value. But He says, The words that I have spoken are spirit, and they are life.

These are words. So Jesus is a man that's come from God, from heaven, and brings a message out of heaven to this world that's going crazy, and He says that those words will give you life.

Those are words to hold on to. But He says, There's some of you who don't believe. So in this world, Jesus' words go out into the world, but some take hold of it and find a sure foundation.

Others leave it. They don't trust Him, and their lives continue to wobble all over the place. Peter's response should be ours. Simon Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[5 : 57] You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. And so God gives us His word to give us a foundation, but that word isn't just this text in the Bible.

It is a bit of that, but it's actually a person, Jesus Christ. And you've got to grab hold of Him if you're going to have a solid foundation in life.

There are words, He gives us words that are upright and true, that are totally trustworthy. But back in Ecclesiastes, God gives us words that prick and push and goad us towards God and towards Jesus.

You see that in verse 11. These words of the wise are like goads. The collected sayings are like firmly embedded nails. Now, what is a goad? Well, a goad is a sharp stick that are used by shepherds and herders to push and prod and spur the stubborn and the wayward cattle to keep moving on to better pastures.

So cattle, sheep, don't really want to move. They like, they'll sit where they sit. Until someone says, hey, this is not a good place for you to be. And they say, oh no, we're fine here.

[7 : 22] And the shepherd, who knows better than sheep or cattle, goes, get moving. And then they move because it's not comfortable there anymore. But he does it so that they don't waste their time nibbling on the scrubs at the side of the road or wander into a place where there's wolves and lions.

But they keep going until they get to the lush, green, life-giving pasture where they can eat food that truly feeds them. And so God's word, Ecclesiastes in particular, goads us along the path of life to find the source of life-giving nourishment in God and especially in Jesus Christ.

Hear what Jesus says in John chapter 6. He talks about himself as being the bread of life. The bread of God is a bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

And he's talking to a crowd, the feeding of the 5,000. Sir, they said, give us this bread. And Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.

And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. And so friends, Christ promises the very things that this world simply cannot give.

[8 : 52] Fulfillment, life and hope, peace and contentment and rest. And so if God's words are trustworthy and they help us, they give us a firm foundation in life, we dare not trust any other words from any other source.

Because that's the problem that got us into this mess in the first place. Remember all the way back at the Garden of Eden? God gave a very simple word. Eat everything. That one tree, don't eat that tree.

And then a being other than God comes along. and says to us, I've got a better way for you. Do this rather. That's going to be much better than what God says.

And so friends, based on this, don't trust your own words. When we look at the world around us, and we, the way, everything is going crazy, we're going to tend to over-inflate the problem and lie about finding any hope or meaning in this world.

I just can't cope. No one understands my pain. God is not with me. When in fact, the opposite of all those statements is true.

[10 : 14] Not only does God know your pain, in Christ, He lives your pain and redeems it and transforms it into a life-giving experience.

So don't trust your own words when you look at the world and you're trying to find out how this world works. Rather, trust God's word in Christ. Secondly, don't listen to the words of the world.

The voices of the world will either want you to give up trying completely, to find any meaning at all. None of it can make sense. So just live your life, do what you like.

Or, try harder to keep finding meaning under the sun in this world, in the things of this world. Work harder. Get those things. In Christian terms, you often hear these preachers, your blessing, your miracle is just around the corner.

But there's a secular version of that as well. We see it every time we turn our TVs on. But don't listen to those words. Because those words will lead you down the road of despair. Because over and over again, Ecclesiastes tells us, meaningless, meaningless, everything under the sun is meaningless.

[11 : 26] It doesn't work. You try and grab hold of it to give you something solid and it's like a smoke. It's gone. You can't, it doesn't help you.

Rather, you would do much better, much better, to base your life on the tools, the instruments, the means of grace that God gives us to cope with life, with living life in a broken world.

Firstly and supremely, His Word, literally the words that you find in the Bible. And there's so much practical advice. If you just open the Bible, if we just read it and we just did the things that Jesus tells us to do, Sermon on the Mount, we'd find a sure footing in this world that's wobbly and we wouldn't have as many wobbles in our life as we do.

But there's also prayer. There's also each other. There's good Christian literature. The means of grace that we took this morning that reminds us of who Jesus is.

We're foolish not to use them and then to expect God to give us joy and hope and a sure foundation. So the first thing that God wants us to hold on to is His trustworthy Word, but we've got to make use of it by coming to Christ and by making use of the things that He gives us through His Word that helps us through life.

[12 : 58] But, even when we live by God's Word, life under the sun, life that we're going to experience is as the teacher in Ecclesiastes says, it's hevel, the Hebrew word.

It's meaningless. It's frustrating. It's a broken world that's full of pain. It's a world where we are wronged by evil, bad things happen to us, and where we respond with evil as well.

We respond wrongly to the evil that is done to us. And that's why the next point, the judgment of God, is so important and why we are to fear and obey Him.

So the next point is God's fearful judgment, God's fearful judgment. Now it's strange you think to yourself, well, how is that going to help me? That just makes me scared.

But God isn't going to leave the world to carry on in an endless cycle of meaninglessness where bad things just keep on happening. God's judgment means that there's going to come a decisive end to all the bad things that are happening in the world, all the bad things that are happening to us.

[14 : 24] when all the wrongs, everything that's been done wrong in the world will be judged and all things made right. But, that day will be a fearsome day and you want to make sure that you're on the right side of that judgment if you want to keep on living.

So, in Ecclesiastes verse 13 and verse 14, get to the heart of the matter. Now, that all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter.

Here is truth. Here is something to stake your life on. Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the duty of all mankind.

For, because God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil. Why does God, why does Ecclesiastes bring in the final judgment here?

Well, it's the antidote, it's the answer to the question of is this all there is to life? Is this all we can look forward to? One commentator, a person called Philip Riken says this, If there is no God and therefore no final judgment then it is hard to see how anything we do really matters.

[15 : 52] But if there is a God who will judge the world then everything matters. One day the dead will be raised and every person who has ever lived will stand before God for judgment.

When that day comes it will be revealed that everything anyone ever did or said or thought has eternal significance.

Now that should both thrill and put the fear of God into us. Everything that you've ever done or thought or said especially when you thought it was in secret especially when it was about that person that wasn't there to hear what you were saying is going to be revealed on judgment day.

And judgment is coming it's a truth and it needs to come otherwise the cycle of endless meaningless continues. Hebrews 10 says vengeance is mine says the Lord I will repay and again the Lord will judge his people it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

friends that's why we're to fear and obey God this is not a judgment that if we face on our own we can survive and that's why we need Jesus that's why it's so important we've got the gospel that tells us who is going to be doing the judging on that day so I'll read from John chapter 5 which we read earlier just as the Father raises the dead Jesus says and gives them life even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

[17 : 44] moreover the Father judges no one but is entrusted all judgment to the Son and then this amazing promise whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Jesus is the judge appointed by God to bring an end to all evil but he's also the one that came to forgive and to save us from judgment and to give life.

If you've got Christ in your life you don't face God's judgment alone but you face it knowing who Jesus is knowing that he knows you knowing that you know someone who knows exactly what it feels like to be broken by evil and he then has compassion and forgiveness for those who come to him for help and salvation.

Reichen again says on these comments on these verses into this vain world the Savior came like us he suffered all of its futility and frustration but Jesus did more when the time was right he took the judgment that we deserve by dying for our sins on the cross and when that day comes everyone who believes in Jesus will stand before the righteous judge and look into the eyes of a loving Savior.

Friends the only way you're going to have a sure footing in this life is to have Jesus as your Savior as your protector the one who protects you from God's wrath but also from all the evil things of this world.

[19 : 36] God will ask you do you have Jesus as your Savior? If not you need to do business with him before it's too late.

Don't continue trying to make it on your own trying to make sense of this world without him. You're just going to make things worse for yourself and for others. Give up on that meaningless quest and trust in God's judge who's also your Savior.

But if you do already have Christ as your Savior in your life then continue to rest in him. Grow in your trust in him.

Lean on him more and more. Not just as your Savior but as a great shepherd and protector of your soul. And that vital role of Christ as our shepherd is the last point that we're going to look at and highlight it here at the end of Ecclesiastes.

Jesus is our protective shepherd. We need him. He's God's protective shepherd. The final and most important thing probably that Ecclesiastes tells us to do to find meaning in a meaningless world is to have Christ as our shepherd.

[20 : 52] I don't know if you noticed that little word snuck in there in verse 11. The words of the wise are like goads. They're collected sayings like firmly embedded nails given by one shepherd.

The Hebrew actually has by the one shepherd. And so the kings of Israel were given the title of shepherd because they protected and provided for God's people in the same way a shepherd does for his flocks.

he chases away the wolves and finds them nourishing pasture and life-giving water. Protection and provision.

Overcoming and judging all bad things anything that can harm us all evil providing the supernatural life-giving power of the spirit to give you life these are the things that Jesus almighty shepherd has come to do for us and these are the things we need from him if we're going to make it through life without falling off over the sides.

Jesus says in John chapter 10 he reminds us I am the good shepherd I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay my life down for the sheep my sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me I give them eternal life and they shall never perish no one will snatch them out of my hand my father who has given them to me is greater than all than everything no one can snatch them out of my father's hand Jesus is the shepherd whose words give us life and whose wise words guide us through life he's the one who judges and makes it possible to live life in a broken world he judges evil he doesn't let it continue he was broken for us so that we could be healed and live healed lives now ecclesiastes remind us that it's not going to be a completely full life but it's not going to be a broken and meaningless life fullness and completion are going to come one day at the day of judgment if you've got

[23 : 35] Christ as your savior and as your shepherd now but by having Jesus as your shepherd you can handle life's hardships knowing that they cannot fully overthrow you no one can snatch you no one and nothing can snatch you out of God's hand evil is not stronger than God God is stronger than evil and so is Jesus any all evil that's done to us is going to be brought to an end and any good that you do is not going to be wasted it's not meaningless but will have eternal significance because it's going to be recognized and praised and rewarded by Jesus your shepherd who's given you the things you need to do good in this world and to push back against evil if he knows you if you've come to him in humility and offered up your life and not just some of it but all of it every pain every triumph every tear every time you laugh every fear and every hope both the good and the bad of life you've got to bring to

Christ and give it to him as a living sacrifice in response to his life giving sacrifice for you so friends the end of Ecclesiastes the end of the matter the conclusion of the matter come to Jesus as your shepherd listen to his words they are trustworthy run to him for shelter from the evil of the world follow him as he leads you in green pastures and by still waters as he restores your soul and helps you find meaning and joy and yes even happiness in a messed up world well let's pray and commit our lives to Christ Lord Jesus you are indeed the shepherd of our soul who gives us life who gives us forgiveness who gives us your word your truth upon which we can base our lives steers us between giving up everything and despair and points us towards the future where all evil is banished and all good things are released

Lord this world is full of trouble help us to trust you to hold on to you and to follow you all the days of our life Amen