

VOC - March 2015: *Ecclesiastes*

2. The quest for grace

Dear Listeners,

This month I may draw your attention to that unique, yet peculiar, book in the Bible: *Ecclesiastes*, also known as "The Preacher." In this book the Preacher takes his audience along to their life and world *under the sun*, to their experiences in everyday life in labour, entertainment, wisdom, etc. He wants to help them *think* about this life; with words of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding he wants to give them a *realistic view* of their life *under the sun*. Last week we started our journey with the Preacher in a quest for *wisdom*, and we concluded with his cry for the *Christ* to deliver us from the futility in this world (which He did, as we know!). Today we continue our view of this life and world under the sun in order to end up with God, whose plan and view and work "above the sun" should show us *His grace*!

In *Ecclesiastes* chapter 3 we find a well-known expression and explanation of our life under the sun in the words "*for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, time to mourn and a time to dance, etc.*" The Preacher gives an overview of the many aspects and facets in a man's life, like birth and death, work and rest, joy and sorrow, building and breaking, etc. He helps his audience, you and me also, to *think deeply* about some 28 contrasts; important matters like 'life and death' that are worth our serious contemplation! In a concluding statement he says then: "*God has made everything beautiful in its time.*" He also notes that God has given every man the need and desire, the ability and urgency in his heart, to *think* about the course of events in his life. That's why it is important that we also use this address via the 'Voice of the Church' for that purpose of reflection, in order that we may hear the *gospel* in it!

I am sure, dear listeners, that you and I have difficulty understanding why the course of events is the way it is. It's not easy either to accept that there *is* a time of break-downs, of sorrow, of loss, of death, to mention a few of the Preacher's observations. Then we do not only observe this *reality*, these *events*, objectively, we also need to realize our *responsibilities* in the way we fill in our lives under the sun. The Preacher also makes his audience and us aware of our accountability before our God and Maker: *how* we built or *why* we broke; *how* we loved and *why* we hated; *when* we spoke and *why* we kept silent, etc. Then we follow the Preacher in his *contemplation* of all events in the way things *develop* in our life and in this world, much of which we cannot explain, or fathom, or comprehend. The *questions* may be many, while the *answers* are few; yet, then the Preacher's *conclusion* may be comforting when he says that nonetheless "*God has made everything beautiful in its time.*" That's a conclusion he can make by faith only!

How is it possible, you wonder, dear listeners, that the Preacher comes to such a conclusion by *faith*? Well, he knows *God*! The Preacher knows of God's *plan*, of God's *history*, with this world! In fact, the Preacher knows and believes that the history in its totality of all events is in *God's hand*! He is our God and Maker not only; He also is the *Maker of history*. The Preacher confessed and concluded this already in chapter 2:24, 25, where he shows that our eating and drinking, our knowing and working, are from the *hand of God*. In chapter 3:12, 13, also, he stresses that everything depends on *God's way*, *God's work*, on the fact that everything comes from *God's hand*! It's all a gift of God to man! Man *depends* on God's goodness, His goodwill, yes on *His grace*!

This conclusion, dear listeners, may seem *easy* to accept and understand when things are going *well* in our life and land; yet it's *harder* in times of trouble, sorrow, and anxiety! Still, then it is by faith in God's goodness and *grace* that we receive those times from God's hand as well and trust that we may *depend* on Him to carry us through them. Our life is in *God's hands*! In order to be comforted, we need to humble ourselves, therefore, and make ourselves *small in the hand of God*, and give ourselves over to His *grace* and *love*. The only way we can do so, then, is realize that in the *centre* of God's history with this world, and *central* in our life must be, His gift of love in *Jesus Christ*! *He* is in the *centre* of the work that "God is doing from beginning to end," the way the Preacher put it! After Christ's death for our sin and guilt on *Golgotha*, we may have *peace* with God by faith; come what may! Let's remember that when we will commemorate *Good Friday* soon again. *His death* made that Friday Good for us! *His death* made *life* with God possible again, and through His death we may look forward to a *life* on the *new earth* without death and destruction, *without* sadness and sorrow. That's the *grace* of God that's a new reality for all who *believe* in Jesus Christ! To *Him* and *His grace* the Preacher led us today! May you also find grace and peace by faith in Him! Till next week and thank you for listening