

VOC - March 2015: *Ecclesiastes*

3. The quest for life

Dear Listeners,

This month our focus is on the book of *Ecclesiastes* (or “the Preacher”). So far we have seen that it seems like a *mysterious book*; yet, upon further study it appears to be an *intriguing book*. In our previous messages we followed the Preacher in his quest for wisdom and for grace. We saw the Preacher’s observations concerning the futilities in this life under the sun, and we heard his cry for the *Christ*. He would deliver us from all vanity and futility, from sin and death in this world under the sun. Then last week we learned about his *quest for grace*. In the midst of the many contrasting realities in our life under the sun, we saw the need for *grace* to cope with life, to accept God’s ways, and to see God’s plan. Then, too, we find this *grace* by *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ! When we see *Him* in the centre of history, of God’s way with this world, and *central* also in our life of faith, we can live in *peace* with God again. Then we can also live our life under the sun in the way of *joy*, *gratitude* and *contentment*. Well, dear listeners, that’s our focus today in the light of *Ecclesiastes 9* and *the quest for life*.

As we have learned from the Preacher so far, his quest it is to search for the *sense of life* in the midst of all vanities. His overall *conclusion* in that regard we find at the *close* of his book: “fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” *God* has the last say in our life, so to speak. The Preacher also notes that the same *lot* applies to all men; believers and unbelievers, they all have to *die*. Then some people react with an attitude of: if that’s the case, it doesn’t matter how you live; while others have said, “let’s then eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” That, however, is *not* the conclusion the Preacher wants us to draw. No, he doesn’t want us to withdraw from this world, or abstain from the joys and pleasures in this world; rather, his quest is that we *live* this life as a *gift from God*!

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do... Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that He has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.” At first impression this recommendation of the Preacher seems rather *superficial* and *mundane* to us perhaps: should he not urge us more to live in *faith* and in the *fear* of God? Of course, the Preacher knows this, as we see in his conclusion to the book (and as we have learned so far!). At the same time the Preacher also shows us what life in this world is like and how much God still *gives* us in His *grace* and *goodness*! Then it’s his quest for a *life in the Lord* that he teaches us here: *how* do we live with the gifts, joys, and pleasures the LORD still gives in this world under the sun? That’s the matter in this *quest for a life* that’s lived in dependence upon the hand of God!

The word the Preacher uses for “*enjoy*,” dear listeners, is a word that denotes that we see with joy and delight what God gives us. It’s the kind of seeing with joy and delight the LORD showed when He *created* all things in the beginning: God saw what He had made and behold it was *good*! God *enjoyed* His handiwork; He loves *seeing* it! Now He wants us, too, to enjoy His gifts in this life under the sun: eating and drinking, health and blessings, wife and children, etc. Indeed, when you consider this world and all that God has made and given in it (birds, flowers, culture, sceneries, etc.) then there is a lot to be *enjoyed* yet. Of course, as the Preacher indicates elsewhere (and as Solomon also depicted in his book of Proverbs), everything should be enjoyed with *moderation* (wine, for instance)! The apostle Paul also repeatedly teaches us to enjoy God’s gifts with *thanksgiving* (Col. 3:17). See what God grants you in His grace and goodness and enjoy it with contentment! That already is an important lesson which we should take to heart in the midst of a world in which people are not *content*, live excessively, or selfishly.

So, it’s true: we’ll all *die* sooner or later; however, that doesn’t mean that we can’t *enjoy* God’s gifts in this life. *Living with God* and living *from the hand of God* in this world, that’s true life! Then it’s true also that there still are many vanities in this life and world under the sun; nevertheless, we may see *first and foremost* that God has given His beloved Son to *deliver* us from them and to *restore* us to God! Yes, then the *believer* may see God as his *Father*, who cares and who provides, and who wants to be served, honoured, and glorified in all that we *receive* and *enjoy* (including food and drink, clothing and shelter, wife and children, labour and service). *Enjoyment*, too, is a gift from God! As is our *toil and labour*, the Preacher adds, as something that belongs to our *portion* in this life under the sun. That, too, is a gift in this life in God’s goodness and grace. Then there may be *vanities* as well, and we know that with *death* there will be an *end* to our labours; yet, *in the Lord* our labour is not in vain! Do what you can in your service to the LORD and do it with all your might! Then we cannot *foresee* the outcome, the results, the success, but we do know that all things are in *God’s hand*! Again, in and of itself life and labour seem *vain*, but in Jesus Christ there is a *future* and hope for it all! That’s what I would like to address *next week*; so, stay tuned! Thank you for listening!