

VOC – March 2015: *Ecclesiastes*

5. The quest for salvation

Dear Listeners,

During this month (of March) I have had the privilege of taking you along to a unique book in the Bible, the book of *Ecclesiastes*. At first impression, we said, the book is peculiar, obscure, puzzling, mysterious, or what have you; yet, upon close scrutiny we received a *clear message* from the *Preacher*, the *author* of this book. Yes, his overview and observations were realistic and sobering, whatever he observed in this life “*under the sun*,” yet, it was to direct our attention to *God*, who is “*above the sun*,” who is the Maker of heaven and earth, and at *His plan*, *His work* in this world. We heard his cry for the *Christ*, we saw God’s gift of *grace* in Him, and we found *life* outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ. He is the *hope* of this world, and He gives a *future* to your life, to your labour, and to your situations in life! Then today we will see that this is all a part and parcel of the Preacher’s *quest for salvation*, and he shows us the *sum* of his quests.

The Preacher, dear listeners, didn’t just *think* a lot about life, about life in this world, he also *participated* in it. He says (1:13), “I devoted myself to *study* and to *explore* by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after wind.” With these words the *Preacher* started out his *extensive investigation*. He observed and explored all things, keeping his eyes and ears wide open. He also tried it out himself, the life of enjoying pleasures such as eating, drinking, and merry-making... *That’s not it*, the Preacher concluded. In this way the Preacher travelled the world, considered *all facets of life*: the world of finances and moneys; he tried out a life of riches, life in nature, labour, social and political life, and in the end he comes to the same *conclusion* he’d observed in the beginning: we’re living in a world of much *futility* and *senselessness*! You may be rich, but when you die someone else takes off with your money; there’s no gain in riches. You may enjoy it, but that’s about it! There are *cycles* in nature; there is destruction in the work of man, breakdowns in relationships, and injustice where you would expect justice.

No man, dear listener, can find *conclusions* about the world in the world *itself*; or the sum of life in *life itself*! “Everything is meaningless,” says the Preacher. Thankfully, the Preacher belonged to the people of the *LORD*. In the midst of this futile world he stood in the *temple* of God. That’s where the *LORD* spoke, where He gave His promises and prospects for the salvation of life. The *LORD* would *break through* the futilities of life. He would *deliver* from the curse that’s lying on this world because of man’s fall into sin! That’s why the Preacher exhorted his audience to be very *careful* when going to the *house of the LORD*, to guard their steps and to *listen* well. That’s where the answers are given! That’s where the *awe of the LORD* is instilled! That’s where the work of *reconciliation* takes place. It’s that message he reiterates at the end of his book: if you wish to determine the *true* meaning and value

of life, you have to use a different criterion: “Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: *Fear God* and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man! *That’s not* empty, senseless!

“*Fear God!*” Have a *deep respect* for God that is, and live in *awe* for Him! Realize that God *is* there and that He is *God!* Realize that this world in which you’ve looked around and lived and enjoyed and enriched yourself and have worked, etc., that *this is God’s world*, the world of your *Maker!* He says it to the youth, to the elderly, and to everyone else who hears his message: “*Live for God; fear the LORD!*” In other words, don’t look *around* in this world, trying to find your answers, wisdom, and conclusions in *it*; look *up* to *God* for answers, and *fear Him* in all that you do! Today, as people living in the NT dispensation, we would put it this way: “Remember *Jesus Christ* in all that you do; realize that *He* is your Lord in heaven! He came to earth to *deliver* you from sin and guilt and death; He came to *purchase* you with His precious blood! He is the *gift* of God’s love for your *salvation!* Live in that *faith*, live in *Christ*, and live again for the glory of God! The fear of the LORD makes *God* the centre of your life again, for whom you live and through whom you live!

“Fear God and keep His commandments!” *Of course*, you’d say dear listener, that’s *part* of it: it should be *obvious* and evident that you live for *God!* Faith and works show us that our *faith is living!* For this is the whole duty of man, the Preacher adds. It is the *whole man*, he says literally. That’s what makes him a *man* again, a *man of God*; it shows that he has been *delivered* from the futility of life, from the senselessness of life, when man is living for *God* again! Then the Preacher adds as his explanation, as the reason for this word of wisdom: “For God will bring every deed into judgment.” You can leave the rest up to *Him*, so to speak! He will come on the clouds to judge the living and the dead! *Jesus Christ!* He will come to *explain* what you can’t understand, can’t judge. There will be a last judgment in which God will see *what you have done with this life*, what you have *lived for*, and where you have found the *sense* of your life, the *purpose* of your life, the *truth* of your life, and the *joy* of your life! Did you find it in God, through *Jesus Christ*, or not?

Yes, dear listener, then it could be, indeed, that on the outside a life looked neat, impressive, or productive, yet that all things were done for *yourself*, feeding your *pride*, forcing *your way*, and doing your *own thing*. Then the Lord will say: that life was *futile*, for it wasn’t lived for *Me!* That life was *senseless*, for it didn’t give glory to *Me!* That life was *evil*, for it wasn’t lived in *awe* and *obedience* to *Me!* Then in that judgment it could *also* be – what comfort that may give today! – that though your life showed your *stumbling*, your *struggling* with sin, which you confessed to the Lord, yet that your heart was directed to *God*, that you lived in the fear of the *LORD* and in the sincere desire to seek *Him* in obedience to His will. Then the Lord will say: in spite of all your shortcomings and sins, which I have removed as far as east is from the west, in spite of all that was broken and sad, your life still was *fruitful* and *joyful* and *meaningful*, for you lived it in *Jesus Christ* and you lived it in service to *Me!* That’s the way of *wisdom*, of *grace*, of *life*, and of *hope*, which is the *answer* to the *quest* of the book *Ecclesiastes* and the answer of *salvation* for you, dear listener, when you *believe* in the Lord *Jesus Christ!* For in Him you will find the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*, eternally! Thanks for listening.