

“Nothing New?”
Ecclesiastes 1: 9

Hello Dear Listeners;

“Happy New Year”! Dare I say this wish has likely been heard more times and in more places these last few days than we could number in a lifetime. No doubt it is a worthy desire of people the world over to experience this year 2016 as a, Happy, a Prosperous, or, better, a *Blessed* New Year.

O, if only 2016 would be a year free from the ravages of terrorism, of war and famine, as well as the life-robbing scourges of debilitating diseases, the miseries inflicted by extreme poverty, loneliness, anxiety, fear.

In the face of so much death, the seeming hopelessness of millions of refugees on the run, is it still appropriate to sing and to “Ring in” a new year, with a libation or two?

There is a book in the bible whose author, a man with the strange-sounding name of Koheleth would appear to say, “No way” for there is “*nothing new under the sun*”! This seemingly sad analysis of the state of the world doesn’t appear to change either if we use the Greek translation of his name and speak of Ecclesiastes, or the Teacher.

It’s right in the beginning of his book Ecclesiastes, which is named after him. The main thrust or theme of the book, “Meaningless! Everything is utterly meaningless” is repeated many times. Even the apostle Paul, in Romans 8:20 is in agreement for he says, that the whole creation is “subjected to frustration” .

The Teacher went on and cried,

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done
 again; there is nothing new *under the sun*.
 Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something
 new”? It was here already, long ago;
 it was here before our time..... (vv 9. 10)

We find that expression, “Under the sun” more than two dozen times in this book of only eleven chapters. Actually, that expression is a kind of a give-away, as we try to understand what the author is saying. For it indicates, if you like, *the playing field*. *The playing field*, to which we are tied down in our daily enterprise, your kitchen, my office, a farmer’s ‘back quarter’ and a scientist’s laboratory. A colleague of mine who wrote an excellent little book consisting of a series of sermons on Ecclesiastes, called Living Under the Sun says,

*Our entire perspective is determined by the possibilities and limitations we have here as creatures under the sun.*¹

The sad thing about one’s human perspective is that it so often doesn’t rise above those realities that are brought home to us by the media; including the news of the day, government action, or... inaction, the rise and fall of the dollar, interest rates, and the cost of feeding a family.

Then it is so, for all the changes that may occur from year to year, so much stays the same. To be sure, the companies that would have us “Oo’ing and “Aw’ing’ at “the latest, which must be the greatest” would very quickly like to squelch this idea that “Nothing is new under the sun.” But they forget they said the same last year and if there is a 2017 they’ll say the same then!

No, that’s not to suggest there are no new things, even new and exciting developments in many areas of life. But, think about it. “*A person works himself/herself, to the bone, one’s whole life long, but at*

¹ Clarence Stam, Living Under the Sun Premier Pub. Winnipeg, p. 14

the end what have you gained? What's left is an old shrivelled person with a worn-out heart" ²

Now we must realize that Ecclesiastes wrote his book even, as he says in ch. 1: 13 as he "Devoted himself to study and to explore by wisdom, all that is done under heaven." His was an honest quest although he had to admit, as he does at the end of ch. one that "*With much wisdom comes much sorrow, the more knowledge the more grief.*" (v. 18).

But then we might remember that the bible is adamant, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?*" (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7) The Teacher knew that. He was after all " Son of David, king in Jerusalem." Though not a few commentators therefore have thought the author was Solomon, that very wise king, it is perhaps better to think of another "son", a descendant of David who may have lived much later.

Whatever his family history, this "son of David" would have known God's rich promises concerning the Messiah, the Deliverer who was to come. He would have known that Royal Son to be above the Sun as the Psalmist says in Psalm 103:19.

Do we want to escape what indeed appears to be a never-ending history that seems stuck in a rut of toil and what the teacher calls, "*A chasing after the wind*" (ch. 1:14) ?

We need to look to the Son who is before and above the sun! We can't look with these dull glasses that only look horizontally, giving a view that is clouded and polluted with sin!

We need to look with eyes of faith and with hearts that know the Son of God came to "*melt the clouds of sin and sadness, and to drive the*

² E. A. de Boer, The Way Out Of The Swamp (transl. of De Weg Uit Het Moeras Twelve sermons about Ecclesiastes, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, 1990 p. 15

dark of doubt away.”³ He, and He alone is, the Giver of Immortal gladness.” He alone is able to “fill us with the light of day.”

Those who look to this *“Only Begotten Son of God.”* Have a perspective that is second to none . To be sure they know, like the Teacher knew, that life ever since mankind’s fall into sin has been a struggle. It is indicative of the fact that Satan, who long ago fell from his lofty position as a powerful angel in heaven is instrumental in keeping many people in chains and in turmoil today. But then there are two more enemies that give a great deal of trouble and cause hopelessness to be found even in Christian circles; Humankind’s sinful nature and a world which is infected and permeated with godlessness.

That’s enough to put a terrible gloomy damper on everything.

Everything except the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who gives true believers a “new life” (Acts 5:20) indeed who *“makes all things new”!* (Rev. 21:5).

In the days of Ecclesiastes Jesus Christ had to yet come. But he had been promised! It is so that God’s people in the Teacher’s days were in distressing straits. There is evidence that this book of the Bible was written sometime between 300-250 BC. It was in many ways a terrible time when once again Israel had lost their independence and Roman dictators ruled Palestine.

Yet especially when you read the last chapter of this book that you realize the Teacher who pursued his quest to seek for meaning to life knew it was not a fruitless one. For even then there was one who was greater than he. One who in the last verses is called the One Shepherd.” (ch. 12:11)

³ From the hymn Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee by Henry van Dyke to the tune of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

It is he who taught both Koheleth and all of God's people to be wise. To be wise and so to look up and to anticipate the birth of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world.

Doing so while fearing God and keeping His commandments. (v. 13b). In that way, the way of God's wisdom, believers will not become stuck in the dreary merry-go-round which, when it comes down to it, is a world and a perspective without God. Then, even as the writer went on to say in ch. 9 a believer may go on to eat his food "with gladness". One may even greet the new year with a glass of wine, so with "a joyful heart ". You too may enjoy life with your wife, whom you love

But we must do so while looking to the Son above. For one day He will usher in His New Year. It will be a glorious New Day of great opportunity the extent of which one can not even imagine today.

But then, said the teacher " *Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.*" That is, *be dressed in holiness*. Be those fragrant citizens who do not raise a stink here, "under the sun" but whose life is centred in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, you too will have a new life. Only believe Him at His Word. And so look forward with eyes of faith. Amen, thanks for listening and have a Blessed New Year!