

*The bottom line.* The final in a series from the book of Ecclesiastes. Preached on February 26, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: ECCLESIASTES 12:9-14  
I CORINTHIANS 3:1-11

Ecclesiastes has been disappointed by organized religion,

Pleasure, wealth and learning.

Any of us who had issues with particular courses or subjects of study could echo AMEN to verse 12

**...much study is weariness of the flesh.**

So what are we to do?

Where are we to go?

What will give to us the sense that we matter? That our life here has not been "a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing."

The Preacher tells us in vs. 13 -

**The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments: for that is the whole duty of everyone.**

That's the bottom line!!

Really? I mean really? It cannot be that straight-forward.

There must be something more

NOPE

Well, why has the Preacher taken 12 chapters to say what he could have said in a few words?

Fourteen words to be exact.

Why not just say that?

I am not the Preacher, you will have to wait to you get to heaven until you get to ask him directly.

I wonder though whether one reason is that we need to hear and reflect upon the Preacher's words to this point.

I wonder whether we would fully grasp this 'bottom line' of verse 13 without all the spadework the Preacher has done beforehand.

For do not the things of this world – wealth, status, power, learning, that sense of immortality hat so many have, self – still tickle our ears far too often.

I wonder are too many of us still guilty of thinking and acting that ultimate satisfaction, purpose and meaning in this life is to be found in the things and stuff of this world.

I wonder if one of the Preacher's roles is to say to the faithful – "wake up" -consider what you think brings meaning, fulfillment and satisfaction in your life

Chances are you are wrong!!

I have come to see Ecclesiastes as akin to the canary in the cold mine

Canaries were once regularly used in coal mining as an early warning system

They would be carried down into tunnels by miners.

The canaries were more sensitive to Toxic gases such as carbon monoxide or methane.

With signs of distress in the birds it indicated that the conditions in the mine were unsafe.

Miners therefore had a chance to either escape or put on protective respirators before being overcome by the gases.

If you continue the metaphor, there are dangerous gases abroad in our world – gases that can cripple or kill our spiritual life –

Consumerism, meism, busyness- no time for God – noxious and threatening each of them and like carbon monoxide and methane – silent and deadly!!

So we come back to that bottom line counsel in verse 13

**Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.**

Godly fear or awe is cited four times by the Preacher (3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12)

Most of us might read or hear read verse 13 and the words ‘fear God’ and think –terror, running from God, seeing Him as a threat.

But that is never the Biblical meaning of the phrase fear God.

Early in my ministry I was fortunate to attend a 2 day conference in Toronto that brought together many of the A list of preachers at the time in one place.

These people gave workshops on preaching. One of the preachers was Ray Stedman who was then at Peninsula Bible Church in California.

In the course of his presentation, he gave an acrostic to help to us to make it easier to remember what the elements of fearing God included

It is an acrostic that continues to serve me well  
*F – faith in his existence.*

You cannot come to God unless you know he is there.

That is where fear begins – faith that God exists.

The whole of the created universe is shouting at us about it.

The Word of God – the scriptures – declare it

There is a world of evidence that God is here.

This is the great and first truth of the Gospel

*E – experience his grace.*

You can never properly fear God until you have learned what kind of God He is.

He is a God of mercy, of grace, of forgiveness

One element of fear remains the experience of the

wonder of forgiveness – that God forgives and

sends you – us – out again with a whole new purpose and a new resource available.

*A – awe at the majesty, the wisdom and the wonder of God.*

What a God he is.

Understanding all the billions of pieces of information in this universe and hold them continually before him;

Hear every voice and relate to every person who has ever lived.

Awe at the sense of his majesty, his comprehensiveness, his unfailing wisdom and power is part of fearing God.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise  
In light, in accessible hid from our eyes  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

*R – resolve.* Resolve to do what he says, to obey his words.

Then the Preacher reminds us – *keep his commandments.*

This is NOT some formula moving toward legalism. Nor is it a method of earning favour to be used when focusing on God.

It is a summary of the beginning, the middle and the end of life as we know it on this earth.

That is,

Coming to know and trust the living God;

Receiving the gifts of life

Learning to enjoy those gifts,

Understanding that God does indeed have a plan – and it is not one characterized by random chaos – but purposeful!

And each of us is involved in that plan. Each of us are being guided into a life where we never cease to wonder, to awe, to give thanks, to appreciate-- even while portions of that life remain a mystery.

That's the bottom line

There is no drum roll, nor blast of trumpets, no screaming clarinets.

The Preacher does not try to be fancy about it.

There are two things we need to pay attention to – two 'musts' –

First – we must take God seriously

Second – we must do what He says. Obey him.

If we are prepared to live consistently and patiently in the light of the Preacher's counsel I believe certain things will follow

You will not find this specifically in the 12 chapter of Ecclesiastes – for it percolates through the book and in the whole of Scripture in general.

*God gives us hope in a way that no human agent can.*

In our world, Murphy's Law seems to be the default position – anything that can go wrong, will

But at the divine level, there is another, and in the end stronger law – *anything that should be set right sooner or later, will.*

What is the point of trying to make the world better if problems of war, hunger, injustice, short sightedness are so vast and it seems never-ending that you and I cannot ever make a dent in them in our lifetime?

God assures us in a way no human agency or individual can – *what we do not achieve in our lifetime will be completed or resolved beyond our life time and in part because of what we did in our lifetime*  
 We are only on this earth a few years in comparison to the eternity of God's will.

As we have considered Ecclesiastes over these weeks, or you have read for yourselves again the book – we see how Ecclesiastes worried – what is the point of all the good I do if I die and all my good deeds are forgotten?

The answer to that question Ecclesiastes realizes is that 13<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 12

**The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.**

Good deeds are never wasted and never forgotten by God

What cannot be achieved in our lifetime will happen when one lifetime is joined to another,.

People who never knew each other in life become partners in making good things happen, because God-who is eternal works things out on the basis of eternity – Kairos – God’s timing.

If we are prepared to live consistently and patiently in the light of the Preacher’s counsel, I also believe

*God redeems us from the sense of failure and the fear of failure.*

How so? God knows better than anyone else our wounds and sorrows, the scars we carry in our hearts,

The memories that need to be healed.

The world in which you and I live, a world that if not outwardly hostile to God, is indifferent to his ways can only and often does judge us on our results, by our achievements.

Have we measured up to some sort of world imposed standard?

I guess that is necessary as far as it goes.

But what happens if for a host of reasons – some beyond our control – we do not or cannot measure up.

Verse 13 reminds *us that God alone can judge on the4 basis of what we are, not only what we have done!*

For God sees into the heart of each of us.

Remember Samuel’s choosing of David to succeed King Saul (I Samuel 16:7). David did not *look* like



the right choice, but as the prophet Samuel reminds us then and now,

**7 But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”**

God not only forgives our failures.

He sees successes where no one else does, not even we ourselves.

Only God can give us credit for the angry words, we did not speak,

The temptations we resisted,

The patience and gentleness little noticed and long forgotten by those around us.

Just being human gives us a certain value in God’s eyes.

Trying to live with integrity makes us successful before him.

We may not be noticed or complimented by others for doing so,

But it does matter if we are helpful, thoughtful and generous.

It matters if we learn to share our lives with others, making them and their world different and better, rather than trying to hoard life for ourselves.

It matters if we learn to recognize the pleasures of everyday, food, and work and love and friendship as encounters with the divine.

The last word from Ecclesiastes, a post script or PS

A warning really to those who get to the end of the book and say, ‘stuff and nonsense’ I don’t believe it!!

**<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, including<sup>[a]</sup> every secret thing, whether good or evil.**

Well, in my experience and reading, no one has ever been shouted into the Kingdom of God, Nor has guilt been the best way to get people to believe in God.

In truth, only the Holy Spirit can convert in the first place.

And only the Holy Spirit working in tandem with God and Jesus can maintain an openly healthy and spiritually vibrant faith in the life of any individual.

So, vs.14 is not some threat of the Preacher What he says here simply and clearly – God will bring every deed into judgement – including the stuff we think God does not know about.

Ecclesiastes does not know how this will be done, Only that it will be done.

*This is what God says and He’s never lied to us*

Somehow in God's own timing and in God's own way, He will cause there to be a replay of our lives.

In the final analysis,

Whether we believe in God or not,

We will be doing business with him

For the One who made us has every right to hold us accountable

How then shall each of you live a life that matters?

Choose wisely!

Let us pray

(William Laud – 17<sup>th</sup> century archbishop of  
Canterbury)

*Grant, O Lord that we may live in thy fear,*

*Die in thy favour,*

*Rest in thy peace,*

*Rise in thy power,*

*Reign in thy glory,*

*For thine own beloved Son's sake,*

*Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN*