

## **ARPC Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022 OOS**

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

You are really welcome to this service of communion and to the worship of God. The teacher in Ecclesiastes has some strong and sobering words about how we are to approach God, summed up by the idea of reverence. He tells us to guard our steps, be careful how you come into his house which means into God's presence where he dwells. He instils in us a sense of caution and of awe. Do you sense the quiet, the reverence, the expectation?

### **Read Ecclesiastes Ch 5:1-7**

### **Praise: In his time (Lord please show me every day)**

### **Reverence Ch 5:1-7**

I assume that we have all come to church this morning with different motivations. God has promised to be where two or three are gathered in his name, so God is here, in this building as he is within the hearts of those who believe in him. The Teacher (Qolheleth) gives instruction which is summarised by the idea of reverence. As we come to God this morning this is how we approach.

**Listen to him. (v1)** This is better than activity even the activity of sacrifice. Our default is to think if we do something for God, he will do something for us, we practically live out a theology of salvation by works. We believe coming to church, reading our bibles, giving our tithe, saying our prayers, serving in the church will in some way endear us to God, cause him to be kind and gracious and the Teacher says if this is your approach to God then you have simply offered the sacrifice of fools and you do wrong even if you do not understand your error.

Instead, we are to come to listen, the great call to Israel in the OT was, *Hear O Israel*, (Deut 6:4) listen to who God is and what he has done. Jesus would speak to the people with this instruction, *Those, who have ears to ear let them hear*, and the apostle Paul reminds the church, *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* Romans 10:17

In that message we are told of the gift of salvation, of the sacrifice of Jesus, of his punishment for our wickedness, of the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit. We listen to the good news that is given. *"Go near to listen rather than offer the sacrifice of fools."*

**Pray carefully (v2-3)** When I was in theological college there was a tension in our thinking about God, some liked to emphasise the transcendence of God, this otherness, his deity and some his immanence, the incarnation, his close presence, his love. Both are true. The teacher highlights the distance between us, and God and he cautions us to speak with few words. He supports this assertion with a proverb in v3 which says if you have many cares you will dream about them, the cares rise to the surface in your dreams. Likewise the fool will speak many words they spill out their mouth. Therefore, distance yourself from the fool and do not speak many words before God.

Jesus highlighted the distance in the prayer when he taught us, “Our Father in heaven” and he said, *“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”* Matthew 5:7-8

Pray carefully.

**Fulfil your vows. (v4-6)** All of you who will take communion today have made vows either in this church or in another. You have promised God that you understand the reality of Jesus sacrifice and that you willingly respond in wholehearted commitment to God within his church. As parents who have had their children baptised you have promised God that you will bring them up to know God and be committed to his church. Those who are married before God have promised God you will love and honour your spouse. These we have taken publicly. Perhaps you have made some personal vow to God, usually along the lines of I will do this if you do that, or out of a sense of a need for a deeper devotion to the Lord.

Fulfil it, honour your vow, don't make excuses. Don't give God cause to be angry with you, say the Teacher. Be like Hannah who promised to give God, the child she so desperately wanted and Samuel and when he was weaned, was given to Eli for service in the temple and do not be like Ananias and Sapphira who promised the church the proceeds of the sale of property but withheld some of the money claiming it to the full amount and they died immediately.

We often make promises when we sing in praise, *“O Jesus I have promised to serve You to the end, be now forever near me my master and my Friend.”*

There is nothing as detrimental to a relationship than lying, making vows or promises and not keeping them. To do so to your headmaster as a pupil would be foolish, to do so as a child to your parents would be foolish, to do so to the Guards would be foolish, to do so before a judge in a court of law would be foolish and to do so before the transcendent Lord Almighty would be foolish. Keep your vows made before God.

**Fear God (v7)** In the Hebrew this is simply a list, there are no verbs, dreams, words, hebel, everything before God is vapour and meaningless, therefore stand in awe of God. Fear God. God holds people to account for what they do and say. This calls for reverence.

### **Prayers of Adoration & Confession**

**Praise:** IPH 199 All my days

**Reading:** Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9

### **Riches Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9**

Casinos, the dotcom era, pyramid schemes, the gold rush, the oil rush, stocks and shares, high end jobs, the lottery, the prosperity gospel there is something about money and riches that appeals, everyone has some inclination to be rich. This is the topic for the Teachers analysis next and it covers the section from 5:8 -6:9 but it doesn't follow what we are used in Western though, a linear argument, it follows a common Middle Eastern idea of chiasma, so the conclusion is in the middle and the argument is built up on both sides. So to help us

follow the argument we will take the outer points in Ch 5 and 6 until we reach the conclusion.

Let us quickly walk through the argument.

### **Pursuing wealth will not satisfy (5:8-12 / 6:7-9)**

(v8-9) In the world you will always see the poor oppressed because of the greed of those above them. Cartels, land ownership, exorbitant rents, price fixing. Those in authority are always watching out for (eyed by) each other, even up to the king. Jesus said, *“You will always have the poor among you.”* The rich are working hard to keep many poor and that is not a way to satisfaction.

(v10) The love of money is never satisfied. The more you have the more you want, and the Teacher recognises that as Hebel. He gives two reasons for this.

(v11) Firstly, the more you have the more people consume what you have. I live in a rich area of Dublin, and I have seen, vans of gardeners, tree surgeons, swimming pool maintenance technicians, French polishers, automatic gate installers, high tech security, milkmen, electricians, window cleaners, painters, general handyman, and corporate party packages and this is what the Teacher means when he says the rich watch others consume their money. That is not satisfying.

(v12) The rich get stressed. Riches are a liability; they are often worried about.

(6:7-9) The rich person's appetite is never satisfied. The rich person has opportunity, options, there is always more to have. The teacher compares the rich person with the poor person and says the poor have an advantage, they know how to conduct themselves, they enjoy what they have, and their appetites are not roving, that is looking for other things to do or for more, because they cannot reach beyond where they are at present.

The place I saw wonderful contentment was in Kenya in the young people who lived in the place I worked. They were content with what they had, at that time mainly because of the absence of mobile phones and TV they didn't know what else was out there until someone like me turned up. Those who were least content were those who wanted what the European culture promised, education being one of the biggest, so that they could get a better job.

Pursuing wealth will not satisfy you, you will oppress those who do not have, you will watch others consume what you do have, and you will always want more and worry about what you have.

### **The sickening evil of having but not enjoying. (5:13-17 / 6:1-6)**

Note that the Teacher has seen a grievous evil. Literally it's sickening and he describes a situation he has seen, a father who has one son and yet loses everything.

He has seen the man lose everything in some misfortune. A poor investment, a recession, fraud, war, natural disaster, illness or death. Having lived for riches they are left with nothing, what does he gain since he toils for the wind, it is grievous and sickening. He is left

with bitterness, regret and anger, he is pictured in his house with the gas and electricity turned off because he cannot pay the bills and eating alone in the dark.

In the second portrait he describes a man blessed with wealth, possessions and honour who could have 100 children and live into his very old age and yet is not able to enjoy what he has, because God does not allow him to do so. We are not told how God does this, possibly because of anxiety, but the ability to enjoy is a gift of God. He goes on to say some very shocking things about this evil, this sickening reality.

Strangers enjoy his wealth. (v1) Perhaps like those who he must pay for the privilege of being rich.

A stillborn child is better than he is (v3-6) I recognise that speaking of a stillborn child may evoke painful memories for some. I believe these words though stark in their comparison offer hope to the parents of a stillborn child. There is comfort for the child though it came in darkness, and its character will never be known, the real meaning of the phrase "*in darkness its name is shrouded*", and it is now at rest which is our hope. The point is a rich person who lives a long life but is unable to enjoy it; there life is worse than no life at all. Death being the destination of both.

It is a sickening evil that the rich cannot enjoy their wealth or lose all they worked for ending in death.

### **Enjoy Gods gifts daily (5:18-20)**

This is the conclusion of the Teachers reflection on wealth. Here is his advice.

1. Find satisfaction in your work while you live.
2. God enables this enjoyment as we accept wealth and possessions are gifts from God.
3. Therefore, do not angst about work or about what you have, enjoy it.

This is grace, we accept what we have as a gift from God. This is a profound and significant position to take and road to travel.

Jesus speaks of two masters himself or the love of money. One gives and saves the other takes and ruins. He also spoke of food that perishes and food that endures for eternal life. Jesus does not think we should work hard for more stuff, instead he promises that those who seek him, and his kingdom will be given these things.

Life here and now and life eternal is a gift from God. The teacher tells us that recognising this and accepting the gift with joy is the only way, is wise and not foolish and leads to deep satisfaction with enjoyment. When that is understood then life is to be lived because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. So, his conclusion is reached, do not pursue wealth enjoy Gods gifts every day.

### **Announcements**

#### **Prayers of Intercession (Ray)**

**Praise:** IPH 406 How can I be free from sin

This beautiful song by Graham Kendrick asks rhetorical questions, How can I be free from sin and how can I know peace within and the answer is to lead me to the cross of Jesus. Let us prepare our hearts as we approach our act of communion with Jesus by recognising our need and his provision.

## **Communion**

### **Welcome and introduction to the table**

Our journey with God through the pandemic has been a long two year one and we are tired, some are exhausted, some are grieving, some are anxious, and some know that their journey is not over because of their vulnerability. We are tired and thirsty travellers. Isaiah tells his tired and thirsty people that there is a day coming and there is a place where they will rest and be refreshed and be renewed. Isaiah Ch 12:1-3 *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”*

For us that day is today, and that place is the person of the Lord Jesus, because of his work in achieving our salvation. So, Isaiah’s instruction is to draw water from that well. To drink joyfully and savour the cool, clean, thirst-quenching water of salvation.

Jesus declared, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”* John 6:35

*“Take and eat this is my body”* Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, *“drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* Matthew 26:26-28

### **Prayer of confession and approach**

So let us examine ourselves.

- Do we have any unconfessed sin?
- Is there anyone here with whom we need to say sorry?
- Are we trusting in Christ alone for salvation?

### **Bread and wine set apart for communion:**

Lord Jesus on the night you were betrayed you took bread and wine, gave thanks and gave them to your disciples; that we might fulfill your command to do this in memory of you, it is in your name and by your authority that we set this bread and wine aside from all common uses to this holy use and mystery.

### **Prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine.**

**Sacramental words:** The Lord Jesus Christ in the same night in which he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: *“Take eat this is my body which broken for you; do this in remembrance of me”*.

In the same way after supper, he took the cup saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me”*.

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Let us respond in thankful praise, singing Jesus, the joy of loving hearts.

**Praise:** IPH 385 Jesus, the Joy of Loving Hearts

**Benediction**

**Questions:**

Do you listen well? When hearing from God, what perspective or attitude might make you a better listener and why?

How important is keeping your word to God and to you? How might this impact your speech in the future?

Which aspect of the Teacher's reflection on riches struck you and why?

Consider the riches God has blessed you with. In what ways do you struggle to find satisfaction and enjoyment with what you already have? How might you pursue enjoying these blessings in the coming week?