

## 3.9.23 pm

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Date: 03 September 2023

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening, a warm welcome to the service this evening. We're going to begin this time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise. Psalm 43 and we sing verses 3 and 4 of the psalm in Galilee.

We'll send thy light forth and thy truth. Let them be guides to me and bring me to thine holy hill, even where thy dwellings be. Then will I to God's altar go, to God my chiefest joy.

Ye God, my God, by name to praise my harp I will employ. These two verses of Psalm 43 we sing in Gaelic and remain seated to sing.

And after we've sung Angus M, we'll lead us in prayer in Gaelic, please. You are the one who who spoke to!

Oh 550 I am the one who is closed on the of Gaelic, please. I am the one who is closed and live ...

[ 1 : 43 ] fowl SpinUNG Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 4 : 23 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 6 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 9 : 23 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 11 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 14 : 23 ] Thank you.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 16 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Eccles, Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 19 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 22 : 23 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 24 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Heavenly Father.

[ 27 : 23 ] We pray.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 29 : 53 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

And if you're, And you're, we take a, that you're, the words, the one who, you're,

[ 34 : 53 ] And you're, you're, meaningless. Everything is meaningless, which isn't the most encouraging start to the book.

The word in the Hebrew is the word hebel, which can be translated as meaningless, as it is in the NIV. It can be translated as vanity, as you'll have it in the King James Version. Or it can also be translated as mist, or vapour, or breath. The word in the Hebrew sounds kind of like breath. It's hebel, which almost sounds like you're taking a breath. Derek Kudner says, A wisp of vapour, a puff of wind, a mere breath, nothing that you can get your hands on, the nearest thing to zero. That is the vanity this book is about. That's the note he begins on. He's asking these questions about life. He kind of gives us his summary thoughts to begin with, and he says it's meaningless. It's vanity, it's vapour, it's mist, it's just a breath. And then he goes on to explain that a little more, and says in verse 3,

What does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun? Generations come, generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, they return again. All things are wearisome, he says, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear is full of hearing. What has been will be again. What has been done, it will be done again.

There's 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.

[ 37 : 44 ] There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow. It's quite an opening statement, isn't it?

I mean, these are deep, big, challenging questions and observations about life. And truth be told, it's kind of depressing.

Which is probably why I've steered away from it up until now. The first impression is that this is quite a depressing path we're being led down.

The writer, the teacher, the preacher, he's saying, what's the point of everything? It's the point of anything. Everything, the sun, the wind, the water, it seems to be going round in circles.

Everything that we see in the physical realm, it's just going round and round in circles. It's getting nowhere. James Phillips says, the natural world exhibits the spectacle of unceasing activity with no real progress.

[ 39 : 00 ] And you could say, we kind of see that. We see the tide going out. It comes in again. Some days we see the sun rise. And it sets.

And we see these streams and these locks. And they fill up. And the water transfers from this place to that place. It rains. The locks fill up.

The sun shines. The water goes back up. I don't remember the school stuff too much. But there's the water cycle, isn't it? And it just goes round and round and round in circles. Ever circular and no progress.

And sometimes we feel like that in our lives even. You wake up. You have your crispies. You put on your work clothes.

You head out to work. You do a shift. You finish. You eat. You sleep. Then you repeat. Day after day after day after day.

[ 40 : 03 ] It's like a circle. We're going round in circles. And the teacher is making that observation. And he says, nothing ever changes. Everything's just the same.

There's nothing new. You might say, well, there's some things new. I've just got an iPhone 14. I haven't got an iPhone 14.

But some of you might have an iPhone 14. And you might be looking at it saying, it's brand new. Look at it. It's got all these features. But it isn't really new. Because I'm told that they're pretty close to releasing the date for the iPhone 15.

So within a few months, what was so new is dated. We're chasing the next one. Nothing's really new.

Then the teacher goes on to say, there's no real point or significance in our lives. We, you know, we do a shift.

[ 41 : 00 ] We get on with things. We might have some achievements. But we'll just be forgotten in a couple of generations. And I suppose it's kind of true.

Think back. If I asked you the question, who's the Prime Minister just now, you'd be able to give the answer. The one before that, probably. The one before that, maybe.

Go back to six or seven. Just in a huge amount of time. Can we remember their names? I don't think so. Can you remember the name? Can you tell me the life story of your great, great, great grandfather?

I can't. And the teacher here is saying that's just the way it is. There's no remembrance of men of old.

It's the way it was and that's the way it's going to be. And so the perspective that the teacher is giving us is kind of bleak. And the mood, you could say, as he poses us questions and as he steps through and shares these observations with us, it's almost cynical.

[ 42 : 12 ] But the key to understanding why this is his position is found in this phrase that he keeps on using. And it's the phrase under the sun.

And if you were to go through the book and underline every time that phrase is used, you'll find it's used 29 times in just these few chapters.

That phrase, under the sun. So what does it mean? Well, under the sun essentially means life without God. Under the sun is the phrase that the teacher is using to describe a worldview that has no space for God.

Like a secular or a humanist or an atheistic worldview. All they see is what is under the sun. And that's all we see.

And it's quite possible that there might be somebody in the room here tonight. And that's your perspective. You're here sitting in church perhaps. You might be watching online.

[ 43 : 21 ] And there's some pressure to watch or listen to the services. But all you actually see and your position at present might be that all there is is what's under the sun.

It's just this world. And if that is your perspective, if that's all that we see, then we will come to the conclusion very quickly that life is meaningless.

And that's what the teacher is trying to point out to us in the opening statement. Life under the sun without God. It's meaningless.

There's a whole lot of things we can apply ourselves to. But without God, if all there is is just this short space of time, it's meaningless.

And the reality is that there are many people today who woke up feeling just the way that the teacher has described.

[ 44 : 34 ] All they see is what's under the sun. The vast majority of people in Scotland, which is now described as one of the darkest countries spiritually in this world, all they see is what's under the sun.

They don't know that there is a God who put the sun in its place. They don't know about this God who's over the sun.

Think about the children of our country at present. The majority of the children in the UK have gone to a school that tells them that this world was not created. It's just banged into existence.

They don't know that God made them.

They don't know that they are created purposefully. They don't know that their lives are not an accident. Because no one's told them. They don't know that God loves them.

[ 45 : 42 ] They don't know that he made them for himself. They don't know that they'll find rest in him. They don't know that God so loved them that he came under the sun into this world to deal with their sin so that they can know him and know the experience of peace and joy and purpose.

It's a purpose that chases away the meaninglessness of life. The meaninglessness of life.

And if we are Christians, our job is to tell them. Our job is to go out into a world that looks a lot like the bleak opening statement of Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and tell them that life is not just what we see and experience under the sun.

But there is a God. But there is a God. There is a God. There is a God. Who is over all things. And who loves us. Who cares for us.

Who has made us for himself. And who promises that we will know joy and peace and purpose and life when we trust him.

[ 47 : 09 ] And that's where God has taken us as we go through this book. As he uses Solomon, as he uses the teacher, he takes us down a road that causes us to ask lots of questions about life.

But the answer is an answer that leads us to himself. But as we travel down this road, as we go through this book, we're taking down some pretty dark paths and some dead ends to lead us to this truth.

So we begin with these questions about life. Questions that I think the majority of Scotland are asking. And then the teacher begins to explore various answers to the questions about life.

And the first answer that the teacher goes looking for is he's looking for the answer to life in study.

So he's scratching his head at the end of verse 11 and saying, it's all meaningless.

Where's the answer? Let's head to university. Let's get the books out. Let's start to study. As we think about this, over the generations and still today, there are many, many people who believe that the answers to life, the answers to the problems of this world are found in education, are found in study.

[ 48 : 41 ] So we see politicians who have been interviewed and they're asked the questions along the lines of, you know, what's the answer? What are you going to do to address the crime levels in the UK?

What can we do to make an impact? What can we do to change things? How do we deal with the increase in life crime in all these cities? And the politicians will come on and they'll say, well, we really need education. People need to be educated.

They need to study. They need to have their eyes opened to address this problem. And that's the solution. But when we think about it, it hasn't worked.

Think about drug misuse or alcohol abuse. I remember as a wee boy being in school and the police men coming along and they gave their speech and they told us about alcohol and they told us about drugs.

And there was that campaign that was going when I was in my early teens. Just say no. So we were well educated in the risks and the dangers.

[ 49 : 42 ] We were told what to do, but did it stop people taking drinking drugs? No, it didn't. It didn't really change anything. Or taking even more mundane example, smoking.

We now know, beyond any doubt, that smoking causes lung cancer. The box that you buy when you buy a pack of cigarettes, it's got a big bowl of thing on it saying smoking kills.

So we're educated in the dangers, but I don't know how many millions of cigarettes are still sold every day. We're still doing it.

And the point is that the answer to life is not found in study. And that's what Solomon says in verses 12 to 18. He says, I, the teacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem. 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've seen all the things that are done under the sun. All of them are meaningless. A chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened.

[ 50 : 52 ] What is lacking cannot be counted. I thought to myself, look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled in Jerusalem before me. I've experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.

Then I applied myself to under the understanding of wisdom and also madness and folly. But I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief. And we know that's the truth. This is not to say that people shouldn't study.

This is not to say that Anna and Natalie and others shouldn't go off to university. They should. But this is just to highlight that sometimes the more that we know as we study, the less we have answers about life.

Go to any philosophy class and they can talk round in circles all day long. Day after day after day. Question leads to question leads to question leads to question.

[ 51 : 59 ] But they never get answers. And that's because the answer to life is not found in what we know in our heads.

The answer to life is found in who we know in our hearts. that's where this book is leading the answer to life is found in knowing Jesus that's where this book is leading that's where the teacher is guiding us that's where we need to go that's where Scotland needs to know the answer to life is found in knowing Jesus and knowing him personally and trusting him and having a relationship with him think about the apostle Paul he was a learned man he was a stunning academic and yet he said in Philippians chapter 3 verses 7 and 8 but whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ what is more I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord so let me ask the question in that location do you know Jesus? because that's what you and I were made for that's where we find meaning that's the answer to the purpose that we are that we are wired to to pursue it's in knowing Jesus so do you do you know Jesus?

do we know Jesus? we're trusting him and in two weeks time is it when the communion table is once more set will we will we come forward and profess that we are those who are not ashamed to say that we know Jesus that our trust is in him lots of questions about life is where the teacher begins he begins to look for answers in study and he discovers that the answer is not found in what we know as we apply ourselves in the universities and colleges and schools of the land but it's found in who we know the answer is found in knowing Jesus two more points no more time to be continued let's pray heavenly father we thank you for this book which does intimidate us somewhat and we find perplexing and yet we thank you that even as we have thought about it for a few moments we can see a reflection of our nation we are given a description of what is going on in the mind and the hearts of many people in this nation who are lost who are searching for purpose and who are going round in circles and can't find that purpose we thank you lord that you have revealed yourself to us we thank you that you have made us for yourself and that we find purpose and peace and joy when we come in faith to Christ and so we pray for all of us here tonight we ask lord that we would be trusting in Jesus we thank you that when you show us our sin you are calling us to come to Christ and we ask that each one of us would not waste our lives going round in circles but we ask that we would give our lives over to you lord Jesus the one who loves us the one who laid down your life to save us and the one who promises to keep us as we trust in you and we thank you that when our faith is in Christ when we have that relationship with Jesus we can find pleasure and purpose in work and in leisure and in study and in all of life but we know that when we look for purpose in these things and turn away from Christ we go round in circles and we come eventually to the conclusion that everything is meaningless so enable none of us to get stuck on that treadmill this evening but enable each one of us we pray to trust you to give our lives to you and to seek as the first catechism says to glorify God and to enjoy him in this world and then forever and we ask all this in

Jesus name for his sake Amen We'll sing to finish Mission Praise 712 Oh soul are you weary and troubled turn your eyes upon Jesus Oh soul are you weary and troubled no light in the darkness you see there's my for a look at the Savior and life more abundant and free Turn your eyes upon Jesus Look full in his wonderful face

[ 58 : 29 ] And the things on earth will go strangely dear and the light of his glory and grace Through death to life everlasting He passes and we follow him there Over us to more at dominion far more far more than conquerors we are Turn your eyes upon Jesus Look full in his wonderful face And the things of earth will go strangely in the light light of his glory and grace

His words of your faith He promised Believe him and all will be well Then go to a world that is dying His perfect salvation salvation to tell Turn your eyes upon Jesus Look full in his wonderful face And the things of earth will go strangely in the light of his glory and grace And now may that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore Amen