

24.3.24 pm

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 0 0] Good evening, warm welcome to the service tonight. Good to see all of you, good to see one or two visiting with us as well. And you're especially welcome. We're going to start and we'll begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise from Psalm 73, which is a psalm where the psalmist looks out at the world and recognises that things aren't the way that he feels that they should be.

And way back then and still today, there are things that happen which cause us grief and cause us to scratch our heads and wonder why. And we have psalms that we can sing that are like prayers that we can take that deal with that kind of thing.

So we're going to begin by singing the first two stanzas of this psalm. And we sing in Gaelic, I'll read it in English. Yet God is good to Israel, to each pure-hearted one.

But as for me, my steps near slipped, my feet were almost gone. For I envious was and grudged the foolish folk to see when I perceived the wicked sort in joy, prosperity.

These two verses of Psalm 73 will sing in Gaelic and remain seated to sing. And afterwards, Angus M. will lead us in prayer. And Gaelic, please. Thank you.

[1 : 5 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 2 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[6 : 5 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 2 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[1 1 : 5 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[1 4 : 5 0] Amen.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

We have to deal with those who have authority over us in all kinds of spheres of life. Now, there is a time and a place to say we must obey God rather than men.

Sometimes we can have an authority over us in government and they'll tell us to do things which are against the Bible. Sometimes we can be in a place where there are those in authority over us and they are telling us to do the exact opposite of what God says.

[37 : 50] And in these instances, we have to say what it says in Acts 5.29, We must obey God rather than men. Remember the apostles were being told, No more talking about Jesus.

That's the law. And they said, We must obey God. We're not going to listen to what you say. So sometimes there comes a time for that, but that's the exception and not the rule.

Most of the time, it's wise for us to submit to those that the Lord has put in authority over us and even to pray for them.

When did you last pray for your boss, the boss that really annoys you? When did we last pray for those in government that we often fundamentally disagree with?

When did we last pray for the referee? Halfway through a football match. We're to pray for those who are in authority over us.

[38 : 58] 1 Timothy chapter 2. Verses 1 and 2 says, First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

So first of all, Solomon, he teaches us about how to live under authority and how to submit most of the time.

The second thing that we have to deal with is living with uncertainty. And we can see that from verse 6 and following. Solomon says, For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.

For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? Do we worry?

I think whoever we are, whatever stage of life we're at, whether we're young in school, whether we're a bit older, heading out of school, whether we're going through middle age with all the conflicting responsibilities of that, or whether we're coming to, at the end of our years, we have wrestles with worry.

[40 : 29] So when we think about worry, what is it that we worry most about? Well, it's actually not the past or the present that we worry about.

It's the future. Usually we're worrying about the future. We're worrying about the uncertain things that might happen, but equally they might not happen.

We worry about the things that we have no control over. We worry about the cost of our mortgage going up, whilst our pay goes down. We worry about health, and that little pain that we have that shoots across from every now and again.

We worry about what will happen when our parents aren't with us anymore. We worry about what it will be like when our children leave home.

We worry about getting our exam results after we've sat the exams and we have to wait for the results to be published. We worry about no end of things. The list is endless.

[41 : 37] And the reason we worry is because, verse 6, we do not know what is to be. Verse 7, we don't know how it will be in the future.

We worry about uncertainty. And probably our biggest worry is death. Verse 8, no man has power to retain the spirit, to hang on to life, physical life.

No man has power to retain the spirit or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

All this I observed, says Solomon, while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his heart.

So as Solomon considers life, and as he thinks through all these things that we have to deal with, as he considers life under the sun, he notes, in verse 8, we can't control wars.

[42 : 51] We switch on our TVs, we see Ukraine, we see Russia, we see Gaza, we see Israel, we see all these places, we can't control wars. We couldn't back then and we can't still today.

We feel the helplessness and the uncertainty and the anxiety that goes with that. We can't control, verse 8, the wickedness of people, whether they're close to us or whether they're far away from us.

We can't control the power struggles of man over man and the hurt that that brings, verse 9. And Solomon underlines for us that we cannot control the day of death, verse 8.

These are unknowns. These are uncertainties for us and that's an inescapable fact of life under the sun.

There is uncertainty. we don't know the future. We might have a plan for this week, but we don't know how this week's going to play out.

[44 : 04] We don't know the future. We don't know what is to be, verse 6. But the good news is we can know the God who knows the future.

We don't know what's coming, but the God who knows what's coming holds his hand out to us and says, trust me with the future.

We have no control over all these uncertainties that Solomon brings into focus in this chapter, but rather than worry about them, we can trust the God who is in control.

And none of us know the day of our death, verse 8. None of us know the day of our death.

But we can come to know and trust the God who numbers our days, as it says in Psalm 139. And he was able to give us life beyond death.

[45 : 18] Living with uncertainty, living under authority. The third thing that Solomon dips into is the reality of living with injustice. Verse 10.

Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. So in this next section, Solomon, he's been at a burial.

He's been at a funeral service. And at the funeral service, there's been a eulogy and kind words, nice, gushing words have been said about the character and the life of the man who has died.

And this man was a man who was in and out of the holy place. He was a regular, you could say, at church. But everyone knows that this man was not good in his character.

He was wicked. And yet, at the end of his days, he's praised. And Solomon says, this is vanity.

[46 : 34] How unjust. And yet, Solomon notes that it's not just at the end of life that there's injustice.

It's not just at the time of death. But it's right through life. Verse 11. He says, because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. We understand that. Somebody does something that's wrong and they get away with it. They think, I can do more next time. Just going to career on down this evil route and I'll just please myself.

No one will catch up with me. And that was Solomon's observation back then. We can pick up the newspaper and read about the same thing any day of the week. Verse 14.

Another illustration of this. He says, there is a vanity that takes place on earth. That there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. And there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous.

[47 : 46] I said also, this is vanity. So Solomon, he looks around and he sees injustice and he laments the fact that there is injustice.

It's the same sentiment that we see in Psalm 73 where Asaph raises similar complaints. He says, why do good people suffer?

Why do evil people prosper? It all seems so wrong. It's all so unjust. It's vanity. And all this is just bang up to date.

It's relevant. We can take any number of illustrations. We can feel this a thousand times over when we watch the news. justice. There's injustice everywhere.

And yet, as Solomon ponders this a bit more, as he pushes us to think about more than what's just under the sun, he realizes that ultimately there is judgment.

[48 : 58] might not always see justice done in this world. In fact, often we don't. But Solomon has that deep conviction that ultimately there will be a final reckoning.

Verses 12 and 13, he says, though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him.

But, verse 13, it will not be well with the wicked. Neither will he prolong his days like a shadow because he does not fear before God.

And this teaching is just so clear and it's so simple and it's so black and white and it applies to every one of us.

And it can be summarized this way. It will be well eternally for those who fear God, for those who trust God.

[50 : 16] It will be well eternally for those who live their lives before God. Verse 12, and it will not be well eternally for those who do not fear God, for those who do not trust God, for those who seek to hide their lives away from him and who seek to go their own way.

there's two paths, there's two ways, there's two destinies, there's heaven, wellness, forever, there's hell, unwellness, not well, forever.

And Solomon is asking us the question, where are we tonight? do we fear God? Do we have that awe, that respect, that trust in God?

Are we looking to Jesus? Is it well with our souls? So that's the way it was back then, Solomon looks around, and that's still the way that it is today.

We live under authority. Sometimes that authority is tolerable, sometimes the leaders do a decent job, sometimes the teachers are on a good class, sometimes it's terrible.

[51 : 47] It's the reality of life under the sun. We live with uncertainty, we make our plans, we schedule our week, but one visit to the doctor, one phone call, one bad decision, one relationship breakdown, one virus, remember COVID-19?

And all our plans go out the window, everything changes. We live with uncertainty, and we live with injustice, still bad people are called good, and good people are called bad, still the wicked prosper, still the righteous suffer.

So what's Solomon's response to all this? well the final point, briefly, is he says live joyfully, live joyfully, which is probably the last thing we expected him to say.

So after everything he said, he says verse 15, and I commend joy, live joyfully, live joyfully, live joyfully.

We want to ask him the question, how can that be, how can we be joyful in this world under the sun, when we have to suffer all these things? How can we have this kind of joy when there are so many things happening at all these different levels, when we're wrestling with uncertainty, and when we're dealing with warped authority, and when we're suffering injustice, how can we live joyfully when we have to suffer all these things in this world?

[53 : 39] That's the question, and the answer is because we know that there is another world to come. Because that's what the teacher is pointing us to.

He's dealing with life under the sun and showing us how futile it is if that's all there is, and the whole drive of this book is to look beyond that to what's over the sun, to the fact that there is a God, and there is more than just this.

So yes, we will see, as we so often sing, we'll see the nations rage, we'll see kingdoms, we'll see kingdoms that rise and fall, we'll see all kinds of chaotic things apparently, but the steadying factor that can give us joy is we know that there is still one king, the king of kings, who rules over all, and he calls us to trust him, to have faith.

faith. And so Solomon finishes up essentially by saying, I can't see that much, but I can see that God is still at work, and because God is still at work, I can trust him, and I can eat, and I can drink, verse 15, and I can get on with life, and I can experience joy, even when none of it makes sense, and there's just deep mysteries.

verse 16, Solomon says, when I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun, however much man may toil in his seeking, he will not find it out, even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

[56 : 14] So Solomon finishes up here, saying, I can't understand much, I can't see much, but I'm going to trust God, and that's the encouragement for us as we come to conclusion, we're to trust God, and for some of us that's a struggle, for all of us at some point in our lives it's a struggle, things happen, and our faith is shaken, and maybe tonight there's somebody here, and you're hanging on by a thread, and you're wondering, how can I trust God?

After this has happened, and that's happened, and the next thing has happened, and I can't make sense of anything, how can I trust God? Where can I see that God is trustworthy? How can I know that he's working in the darkness?

How can I know that he's still active, and he's working for good and for glory, even though I can't see any of it? Where do I go to understand all this? And the answer is, we go to Calvary.

We go to that place that we must never drift from, we go to the cross. That's where we see that God works in the darkness.

this. At Calvary, remember, everything was so dark, and everything seemed so wrong.

[58 : 04] At Calvary, on the cross, we see the abuse of authority, as political leaders gang up to conspire against Jesus.

And at the cross, we see the disciples, and they're dealing with uncertainty beyond anything that they could ever have imagined. They can't understand anything that's going on.

The one they thought was the Savior, the Son of God, is dying. And at the cross, we see the crass injustice of everything that was going on.

as Jesus, the righteous one, suffers. And Barabbas, the terrorist, goes free.

And yet, at the cross, God was working. So that darkness would be overcome with light.

[59 : 13] So that death would be overcome with life. so that sin would be overcome with salvation. So that Satan would be overcome by Jesus.

So if we want, if we want our faith to increase, don't read the newspapers, go back and read about the cross.

need to finish. So let's finish by going back to the start.

Let's go back. Don't worry, one minute. One minute and you can relax. Let's go back to the start.

Let's go back to the inspirational, motivational quotes like, you can do whatever you want to do.

You can be whatever you want to be. There's no limits. Let's go back to these quotes just for a minute as we finished. These quotes are designed to inspire us and motivate us and propel us out of our beds to just fly out the world.

[60 : 34] But the truth is, there's nothing more depressing than these quotes. because no matter how many posters that we stick on our walls saying you can be wherever you want to be and you can do whatever you want to do, you can't.

I'd like to fly. I'd like not to have to be dependent on whether the ferries go or don't go or the planes take off or land.

I'd like to fly. I'd really like to fly. But as much as I might want to, I can't. I'd like to be the centre forward for Celtic Football Club.

But no matter how much I might want that, it's never going to happen. I'd like my grey hair to turn brown again. It's not going to happen. It's the reality of life under the sun and Solomon wants us to see that.

Why? It's because when we see our own weakness and when we see our own inability to control things, then we stop trying to control everything.

[61 : 54] And we stop worrying, at least to some degree we stop worrying. And we start to have peace. And we can start to live joyfully as we look to the God who is over the sun.

And we trust that he is still working for the good of his people and for the glory of his name.

We can't always see how he's working, but he is working. So be encouraged to trust him, says Solomon.

in Ecclesiastes chapter 8. And we'll pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how relevant it is.

And we pray that you would help us to take hold of it by faith. And help us when we're going through life in this world and when we struggle sometimes with authority authority in the way that it shouldn't be authority.

[63 : 09] And when we struggle with the anxiety and the uncertainty of not knowing what will be, and when we are subject to sometimes the worst kind of injustice, we pray that you would help us to trust you and even to live with a peace and a joy that is not of this world because we are trusting in you.

So give us faith we pray and help us to have our eyes fixed on Jesus and help us in this Easter week especially to have our hearts continually at the cross where we see your love for us and the work of salvation that we benefit from when we believe in Jesus.

Help us believe we pray. Amen. We sing to finish for Mission Prey 757 when peace like a river.

Amen. peace like a river God tend at my way when sorrows like sea billows roll whatever my Lord you have taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul it is well with my soul it is well with my soul love oh

Satan should buffet if trials should come let this bless the children's control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul it is well it is well with my soul with my soul it is well it is well with my soul my sin o'er the place of this glorious spot my sin not in part but

the whole is nailed to this cross and I build it no more praise the
[66 : 32] Lord praise the Lord of my soul it is well it is well with my soul with my soul it is well it is
well with my soul for me he it tries he it tries tends to live if Jordan above me shall go no plans shall
be mine falling death as in light you will whisper your peace to my soul!
it is well it is well with my soul with my soul it is well it is well with my soul!
Lord it's for you for your coming we wait the sky not the grave is our goal!
O jump of the angel the voice of the Lord blessed hope blessed rest of my soul it is well it is well
with my soul with my soul it is well it is well with my soul and I may the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and
forever more Amen