

Fearless Questions

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[0 : 0 0] all right good to have you here who else is due today did i miss yes liz wall associate pastor first church of the nazarene oh yeah where first church where at that on uh he's laying in 19. good good to have you here uh did i miss anybody yes great great so yes i went halfway and i'm unemployed and is he going to region or is it just just going to regent college great i can't believe it we went to the whole exercise and not one attorney it's incredible and not one developer and no financial planners it's incredible this is uh great okay well it's good to have you here and as i want to remind you this fall as we kick this off is that our goal is to encourage you to come there's always a light lunch no host lunch to come bring your friends and to build bridges between um d.t niles the theologian said years ago that the role that of anyone that speaks is for christ is to build a bridge between the world and the scriptures because so often people either live in the scriptures or they live in the world but a good teacher builds a bridge between the two see what does christ have to say about the world and john scott said you have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other when you preach well i personally think harry does that very well and um i'm delighted he takes this on uh well michael green's been speaking a couple of weeks uh an effable lovable jeff still is going to speak in a couple of weeks so we give harry rest once in a while but we're very glad to have you here and i hope you will make a note when you come if you see a new person make them welcome there's a lot of different people here we counted it up last spring on a given wednesday there were 15 different denominations represented in the room as well as many people didn't even go to church which seems just about right that's what we want okay oh we'll have an attorney do something ross is going to read the scriptures oh uh scripture is wrong harry is it the whole thing i keep stealing all my money do you want him not to reading a scripture no we're not going to have attorney do anything we're going to keep this totally clean next week maybe thanks harry we're all yours anyway today we start on what uh on on the book of ecclesiastes uh this is not the book of ecclesiasticus which is in the uh in the apocrypha this is ecclesiastes which is in the bible and you may not know it's in the bible because a lot of people may not want you to know that it's in the bible because uh uh uh it's a fairly uh despairing kind of statement about uh the nature of human existence and uh the uh i really like it uh but i i think it's a kind of morbid fascination that i have with the book of ecclesiastes because it says all the nasty things that it's possible to say in fact i for your advice i i drew this black panther here to warn you that you're unless you're 45 or over you probably shouldn't read the book of ecclesiastes uh but that's that's the warning so you've had it

um the uh the the questions and this is uh what i wanted to talk about today was was the questions from ecclesiastes and so i've listed them uh right through the book which is 12 chapters long and uh i think a lot of people think that they come along to the christian faith to the new testament and say uh there's a lot of questions that it doesn't answer well i want you to know that it's based on a lot of questions that it had asked hundreds of years before and that the new testament is not written uh ignoring those questions but is written in a sense profoundly to answer those questions so that if you want to start at the bottom in terms of human experience ecclesiastes expresses a lot of the questions that are closest to man's heart as he struggles to find the meaning of his life and uh there they are what does look at them with me will you what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun that's a question that probably it's best not to ask is that the toil goes on anyway and uh is there a thing of which it is said see this is new and i was impressed with an article in the uh manchester guardian about a tennessee patent office which closed in the 1870s because there was nothing left to be invented uh but you'll be surprised to know that the article goes on to suggest that maybe they were right and that uh the great inventions on which the 20th century has uh lived the great technologies most of the primary work was done in the 19th century and uh so he makes an argument which you can uh which you might be interested in to see why why perhaps there is nothing new under the sun i said of pleasure and this could undermine the whole of british columbia with one sentence i said of pleasure what use is it what uh what uh what can the man do who comes after the king you know the king has all the power all the money all the prestige all the authority if he asks the questions nobody can ask them better than him so he sets up the king and he's really the the the figure who writes the book of ecclesiastes he with his power his money his authority his prestige his background everything's available to him to research the questions once he's done it is there anything more you can ask and that's why that question is there in chapter 2 verse 12 in chapter 2 in verse 15 what befalls the fool will befall me also why then have i been so very wise and that can create the crisis in the life of some young expert at about 43 years of age ah when he gives it all up puts on his sandals and denims and goes off to find a new world chapter 2 verse 18 says the man who will come after me who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool in other words if you've accumulated a great fortune built a great company the agony of your life is that you've got to turn it over to somebody else and it's liable to be a fool uh and even if he isn't you'll probably think he is anyway uh who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth so all human optimism is smashed by that question the assumption that man goes up and that beasts go

down is there's no warrant for it who can bring a man to see what will be after him uh that's the question you just don't know we don't even know about tomorrow for whom am i toiling and depriving myself of pleasure that's the kind of friday afternoon syndrome that most of us go through why should god be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands why isn't god appreciative of who you are and what you've done and that's one of the big questions because we think he ought to be uh what gain has he that toiled for the wind spent all his days in darkness and grief in much vexation sickness and resentment and that's a very profound question that uh many of us face at times in our life maybe at three o'clock in the morning that question becomes most uh present to us who knows what is good for a man while he lives the few days of his vain life while he passes like a shadow what is life all about is certainly a profound question that comes out in ecclesiastes 6 11 the more words the more vanity you know that we we hold conference we get together we talk and we talk and we talk and we talk but do we get anywhere with it that's i find that a little convicting uh but i'm going to go on anyway then i as mostly we do um consider the work of god who can make straight what he has made crooked you know that the way god has made it is the way it is and you're not going to change that who is like the wise man who knows the interpretation of a thing that we are surrounded by unfathomable mystery that we can't properly interpret who may say to the king what are you doing you know you can't question ultimate authority verse chapter 8 verse 6 man's trouble lies heavily upon him for he does not know what is to be he cannot uh who can tell him how it will be he doesn't know where he's at he doesn't know where he's going and the last question in the book is a fool multiplies words though no man knows what is to be who can tell him what will be after him well those are the questions that that we have to face now i i read an article by a secular humanist who's a fellow named kurtz who's a professor of philosophy at the state university in buffalo new york and uh he has a number of questions which as a secular humanist he wants to put to god and they are why didn't you give me more evidence that's fine the another question he says why does why does this supposed god permit so much evil in the world a very familiar question why does he kill babies with incurable diseases raises the question why do we kill ones without that why does he inflict pain on the helpless why god do you demand obedience and uh he says if i got to heaven i'd ask god to rearrange the furniture of heaven and to reorder it in a more just way it's wonderful the way people consider themselves to be more just than god but he says of course i can't ask these questions because there's nobody to ask them too and so he says this is all hypothetical because there's no one to ask the question too because and i would like just to suggest this to you that if there is no god ultimately there are no questions and if there are no questions of course there can be no answers and if there are no answers there's no possibility of meaning

and if there is no possibility of meaning there is no purpose and herb you'd be better to put a little strychnine in the fruit juice and we would all come to the ultimate conclusion of what life is all about if uh if that's the way it is so what happens and i this is what i want i want to uh suggest to you is is perhaps the function of these of these noon hour sessions is that uh is this uh that you have here this kind of thing here that's uh downtown i did this last week so some of you will be familiar with it that's the cross of calvary signifying the person of jesus christ and i said what happens is that if you are well established in the business community and you look at the person of jesus christ at the place where god humbled himself you would have to say totally irrelevant to this world and the function of coming here to look at the scriptures for half an hour is that you can come over here and look back at this for a few moments and i suggest that your response if you ask the questions of ecclesiastes is to say totally irrelevant which is of course what the book of ecclesiastes does it says of the whole human enterprise vanity of vanities all is vanity a striving and a chasing after wind so it says of the business community uh it's totally irrelevant just as the business community does the same in a sense with respect to the revelation of god makes of himself and jesus christ at the cross of calvary and says well in terms of what i got to do today the deals i'm involved in that's all totally irrelevant well i think you need to see that tension between the two and uh i want just to go on and talk to you a little bit about uh how the business community i think becomes idolatrous i mean that that's that's the impact of being in belonging to there's a book which i suppose derived its name derived its title from uh from uh the book of ecclesiastes which i read this summer uh i have friends who don't approve of reading novels and uh i'm torn when i confess to you that i did however it was called bonfire of vanities and it was by so you read them too that are yeah so there's more than one of them and uh it's it's a wonderful story of the totally idolatrous nature of the business community and uh the thing is that this is created by man but by by our humanity but it's also worship by us and to be here and to be involved in that worship is what occupies much of our lives and the reason i'm telling you this is because the questions from ecclesiastes are the only way that you can keep some perspective when you're in the midst of this every day of the essentially idolatrous nature of it and i don't see that there's any escape from us being involved in this but there is an escape from assuming that it demands to be worshiped

so when i went to toronto on the airplane last week i picked up a business magazine and i took my pencil and messed it all up and uh these are the kinds of things that i found there which i which i want to suggest to you as the essentially religious nature of this idolatrous community which is called the business community if you read their literature the book had on the front of it the spirit of success that is success is in a sense a spiritual reality for which the community is striving because success is the great goal of the community so that was on the front reading some particular advertisements i read of a firm which is striving for success individually and together we have made our firm synonymous with success a name that people respect in industry in the community in the continent and even the world now that's a highly idolatrous statement i would suggest to you of their view of who they are and how the world should come to worship them it goes on to talk these are just glossy ads in a business magazine i'm quoting from uh another another one it says that i mean that's a that's a company which got regards itself as having a gospel of success for the whole world to see and that's the way it set itself up in that very religious concept uh i i thought to myself if i work for that firm i sure wouldn't go to church on sunday because uh you know i'd have had all my worship monday through friday of the firm i worked for and they would have demanded my absolute worship i would think another another firm talks about commitment that is getting to know each other's clients uh getting to know each client's business in other words that there there is a tremendous level of commitment that is required if you're going to be in this business world and it talks about commitment in a lot of advertisements we are committed to you you know we want to provide for you what you badly need and we are committed to see that you get it so that's another highly religious word commitment and they and the business community respects it they one another firm talks about a product which is totally unique and revolutionary well that's got to be a slight exaggeration and uh and yet they talk in those terms which i mean the the whole concept of of the kingdom of god is the ultimate revolution and uh and they are contributing to the ultimate revolution by a product which is totally unique they talk about our broad-based technologies listen to this our broad-based technologies help us to create new worlds they have taken over from god in the business of creation now you know and uh he just created this one which isn't so successful but they're creating new ones which undoubtedly are much more successful uh it goes on to talk about uh uh uh an engineering company promises a new reality a better way which is of course they have a messianic concept of themselves that they are the way they're the better way they are the new reality i am the way the truth and the life i mean they haven't said it yet but they come awfully close to saying that and uh they want their customers to believe it

[20 : 17] but it must be even more difficult for the people who work for them and then one others one other advertisement talks about and i love this one the hallowed you recognize the word uh the hallowed 15 percent commission on gross billings you know and you you talk about hallowed be your 15 percent commission on gross billings so uh i'm suggesting that that that the business community self-consciousness is of something which calls for the money for being worshiped um and uh there's there's another great company which shows a lovely picture of the incoming wave at the ocean's shore and they say to of they say of themselves twice a day every day the tide comes in and so do we.

It's a wonderful picture. And I mean, it sells computers too, I bet. There's also a lovely picture, which most business magazines have, of the chairman in a velvet chair sitting there looking what I would think was arrogant, but I'm sure that's not what was intended.

But he seems that way to me, and it says, it says, the chairman. And then underneath it has written, the master of his own fortunes.

Now, you know, that's heavy stuff, especially if he believes it, you know, because he comes very close to the fellow that Christ talked about, who was the chairman, master of his own fortunes, who said, I will tear down my barns and build greater.

Thou fool, this night thy soul will be required of it. And it's this totally idolatrous nature. And I would like to know from you in the course of subsequent conversation, why you think there is this plethora of business magazines now?

[22 : 30] I mean, they're all over the place. Why is half the Globe and Mail a business section? Why is the Financial Post competing, or Financial Times competing, on a daily basis?

Except that the idolatry of success at the center of our way of life is the thing which commands our commitment, which creates new worlds, which is the new God we worship.

Well, I tell you that because I think the book of Ecclesiastes, by asking these questions, in a sense, comes along with the pin to prick this idolatrous concept.

When it asks the question, what does man gain by all its toil? What happens if you believe this? Is there anything of which it can be said, this is new?

I suppose to absolutely unique and revolutionary. Well, these questions, in a sense, help you to keep perspective. Only God is God. Everything else, the book says, is vanity, emptiness, chasing after wind.

[23 : 40] Ultimately empty, utterly empty, totally devoid of meaning, taken by itself. And the statement that Ecclesiastes uses all the time is, under the sun.

In other words, within the whole time-space world in which we live, there is nothing which intrinsically has meaning in itself. the whole meaning is derived from another reality, and that other reality is a transcendent God.

And if you look at the whole process, which is this, you are creating a God where there is no God. And that the only way that you can stay in that relationship is if in some way you can get this perspective on that, if you can ask the questions of Ecclesiastes about that.

In the marketplace, you're trapped, I think, between this massive, glittering idolatry, which we have created with our own hands.

I mean, it's not somebody else has done it. We have created the great shrines and temples that dot the downtown. We've created them with our own hands, and then we are compelled by the kind of pressure they create for us to worship in these hallowed halls.

[25 : 11] These are the places that demand commitment. These are the places that demand striving for success. These are the places that demand discipleship. And there's a movie which Fran and I went to last night called Parents, which gives a wonderful illustration of the essentially idolatrous nature of business in a movie.

So it's a very interesting thing. I mean, people would say that it's too romantic, too sentimental, and too optimistic, but it gives a good picture, nevertheless, of this massive, glittering idolatry, which we create with our own hands.

And forget that the thing that we have to confront in the midst of this is the reality of the God who, in Christ, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, humbled himself, being found in fashion as a man.

he became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. And that is the reality of God. That's why Ecclesiastes asks the question, so that you will not be trapped in the idolatry of this community.

And I'm not saying that this community can be wiped out, because I don't think it can. It has a function, but its function is not in itself, its function is beyond itself. In terms of itself, this is just another phenomena under the sun, marked by vanity and emptiness.

[26 : 58] But there is a reality beyond that, and that reality has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. So that I would just like to finish by giving you this simple picture.

Again, in this same business magazine, there was an article entitled, Render Unto Caesar. Full stop. They didn't go on to what you render to God.

They just wanted to talk about rendering unto Caesar. And it was the Fraser Institute that supplied the information for them, what you have to render unto Caesar. And it said that if you are an average British Columbia family, your earnings this year will be in the area of \$44,000, and you will render to Caesar \$21,000 or \$2,000 of the \$44,000.

And that's the fee to belong in our society. But you see, when they went to Christ and they said to him, do we pay taxes to Caesar?

He said, yeah, you've got to pay your dues because that's where you are. whose image and superscription does that coin have?

[28 : 15] It has the image of superscription of the Caesar. You have to pay him what belongs to him. But he says, you are marked by the image and superscription of the God in whose image you have been created.

so that the basic reality of your life is the relationship to God. And while you can do what this business magazine does, say, well, I know what I have to render unto Caesar and leave the other reality of your life, and that is the fact that you are bought with a price, that you are created in the image of God, and that ultimately the only answers to these fundamental questions are to be found in God.

For the next five sessions, we're going to be looking at Ecclesiastes and going into this, what it teaches more carefully. But the thing I'd like you to be aware of is the questions that it explores.

and as we look at the answers that it comes up with, where those answers point to in terms of our lives. Let me pray. Our God, we live in and are dependent upon the whole process of business and technology in our community.

we are called nevertheless to render to you the thing that belongs to you. And we, at the deepest level of our own conscious being, belong to you.

[30 : 07] And the claim that you have made on us through your Son, Jesus Christ, and his death on the cross is a claim we can't ignore. As we ask the questions, keep us free from the idolatry which is so attractive to us and bring us to the place of acknowledging you to be our God.

Jesus Christ, we are the one of the things that we have to do. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.