

# God's Alternative To Vanity

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to our service today from Stornoway. I trust that you've all been well and that you've known the Lord's blessing over the past week and I trust we'll know the Lord's blessing today as we come together in this way to worship him. I have one intimation to read out. First of all, this is on behalf of the Presbytery and it's as follows. The induction of Reverend Deanne Thompson to the pastoral charge of Garibust Free Church of Scotland will be held this coming Friday 22nd January at 7.30pm at the School Road Church in Babel. Reverend David MacLeod, moderator of Presbytery, will preach and preside and due to the current COVID-related restrictions the number able to attend in person is restricted to 50 and the rest will join the service by Zoom video conferencing facilities. Western Isles Presbytery will meet via Zoom at 7pm. Five members of the Presbytery will be in attendance at the School Road Church and will join the meeting from there.

The service will be recorded and it should be available for viewing on YouTube via the Garibust Free Church website shortly afterwards. Do please remember Mr. Thompson and his family in your prayers and the congregation as they settle into the congregation and that his ministry in Garibust will be an abundantly fruitful one under the blessing of God.

I'm going to begin our worship now and singing first of all in Psalm 34, Psalm number 34 in the St. Psalms, page 40 of the Psalm books.

Psalm 34, we're singing verses 1 to 8 or to 9 it is. At all times I will bless the Lord.

At all times I will bless the Lord. I'll praise Him with my voice. Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice.

[ 2 : 29 ] Together let us praise the Lord, exalt His name with me. I sought the Lord, His answer came, from fears He set me free.

They look to Him and shine with joy. They are not put to shame. The suffering man cried to the Lord, from Him deliverance came.

The angels of the Lord, from Him deliverance came. The angels of the Lord, from Him deliverance came. And guards continually, all those that fear and honour Him, He sets His people free.

Come, taste and see. The Lord is good. Who trusts in Him is blessed.

O fear the Lord, when need you will not be oppressed.

[ 4 : 23 ] Now let's read from God's Word. Reading today is in the book of Psalms, Psalm 119. And we're reading the section beginning at verse 57.

We'll read on to the verse marked 80. Psalm 119.

And at verse 57. The Lord is my portion. I promise to keep your words. I entreat your favour with all my heart.

Be gracious to me according to your promise. When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies. I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.

Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law. At midnight I rise to praise you because of your righteous rules. I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

[ 5 : 28 ] The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love. Teach me your statutes. You have dealt well with your servant. O Lord, according to your word.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good.

Teach me your statutes. The insolence smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts. Their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law.

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Your hands have made and fashioned me.

Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

[ 6 : 36 ] Let your steadfast love comfort me, according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me, that I may live, for your law is my delight. Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood.

As for me, I will meditate on your precepts. Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies. May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame. And we pray once again that God will follow with his blessing our reading of his word. Let's join together now and call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Our gracious and merciful God, as we come together today in this way to worship you, we pray that the fear of God may truly rule in our hearts.

We have been reading in your word the words of the psalmist of long ago, and we know that much of what he says is still relevant to us today, especially in terms of our relationship with God. We thank you today, Lord, that we have this great privilege of coming into your presence, of coming by way of the access we have through the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray today, Lord, that we will meet with you in that access.

[ 7 : 59 ] For your promise is that if we come and turn to the Lord, the Lord will turn to us. And if we seek you with all our heart, we shall be found. We shall find you. We bless you today, O Lord, that you have dealt with us so mercifully and graciously all the way through our lives.

You have never given us what we deserve in terms of what our sin deserves. You have dealt with us, Lord, in your forbearance and longsuffering and patience and mercy.

We thank you today for your forgiveness, the forgiveness which in your word we read of so frequently, which you commend to us through the gospel. We bless you, Lord, that that forgiveness is complete, that it is a forgiveness in which our sins are put out of your sight, covered over and buried in your own tender love.

We bless you, gracious one, that in that way we are among those who will never be condemned.

We thank you that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to prize these great truths and every other aspect of truth that we find in your word as we come through the various changes, difficulties and trials and challenges of life.

[ 9 : 23 ] The psalmist, as we read, spoke of his own circumstances, of the way that he was reviled or ridiculed by others, the way that your providence caused him much pain and suffering and affliction.

Yet you taught him, O Lord, that all of this was in your own best intention and goodness for him.

And we thank you, Lord, that we today can come and hold on to that great principle that the Lord is good and does good.

We pray today that that goodness will be experienced by us, not only in our time of worship here, but in every other aspect of our life and through all our days.

We give thanks, Lord, today we belong to your church in the world, that we belong to those believing people. And the psalmist himself reminded us, Lord, of how he was a companion to those who fear you.

We bless you for that companionship. We thank you for the way in which we have support and help and fellowship and everything else that we come to think of in terms of our believing human relationships in the way in which we find ourselves in your church in this world.

[ 10 : 38 ] We thank you especially, Lord, for the way that you make us members of Christ, the way that you unite us to him as we come to know that faith that your spirit creates within us and by which we are united to you.

We thank you today, Lord, that you have promised that if we come and confess our sin, that you will be faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Bless us, we pray, against all the wiles of the devil. Your word so frequently brings before us his attempts through various agents as well as at times openly in our temptations to draw us away from you, to set our heart on things of this world of life beneath the sun.

Help us, we pray, to resist the thought that life is better without God. Grant that we may, Lord, at all times find that our delight is in yourself, that you are the delight of our hearts, that you are the foundation of our hopes, that you are the one we expect to meet with when this world is done.

We give thanks, O Lord, that your word prepares us for such an eventuality, and that your word sets out before us all the things that are contradictory in sinful human thinking.

[ 12 : 05 ] We bless you that in your grace and through the power of your spirit, all that we have broken ourselves through our sinfulness is, O Lord, overcome.

And you come to mend our lives and put together that which sin has broken. Bless today, we pray, all who hear the gospel. We ask that your blessing will be with us here in this service of worship. We pray that you would be with all who gather together in whatever way today throughout the world in the worship of your great name. We pray that your kingdom will advance, that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray today, especially, Lord, for those who are afflicted. We pray for those that we know ourselves, especially in our congregation and community, who today are afflicted through the passing of loved ones whose hearts are heavy, who mourn and who grieve over their passing. And we ask, O Lord, especially, that you would draw near to them. And we think especially of Jessie McLeod with the death of her brother, with other aspects of your providence is also such a challenge to her.

[ 13 : 16 ] We pray too for Peggy Mackenzie. On the sudden death of her husband, Donnie, we ask that you would be with her and with the family, with all of those loved ones today, Lord, who miss loved ones who are gone now from the scene of time.

Be pleased, we pray, to draw near to them, to comfort them, and to assure them of your presence for all who come to trust in you. Remember throughout the world, O Lord, those whose cry ascends today from mourning and sorrow and tragedy.

We pray that you would grant blessing, Lord, throughout this world when we know of this pandemic still so rampant amongst us. Be pleased, we pray, to come with your power.

Be pleased to come with your own help to us. Help us as we call out to you, O Lord, that we may know your providence as the psalmist did and be able to say with him, it was good for me that I was afflicted.

When you come to afflict us in your providence, Lord, we know that you have a purpose. And even if we cannot, Lord, see every aspect of that purpose, yet we know that it is in principle the same as it was for Israel long ago, for whom 40 years in the desert was a time of testing, as you reminded them through your seven Moses when that journey had come to its end.

[ 14 : 37 ] That the Lord led them through these years to test them to see what was in their heart, whether they would be obedient to the Lord or not. And Lord, we give thanks today that your word reveals such principles to us.

We pray that your blessing too will be with those who have happy news in their lives. We give thanks for new life having entered into the world. We thank you, Lord, for the safe arrival of Finley and Ruth's child.

Finley, Eric, we give thanks that you delivered them safely, that you kept Ruth in her journeys to hospital on the mainland and back. We pray that you bless them as a family and help them rightly to celebrate, O Lord, this happy event.

And we pray that you bless parents and grandparents alike. Bless all others, we pray, who have such happy occasions today to celebrate. We ask that you would be with them and help us as Ecclesiastes has taught us.

Truly, Lord, help us to celebrate when it's right to do so and to enjoy the good things of life. We ask that you would bless today the congregation at Garibust.

[ 15 : 48 ] We think of them, O Lord, as they anticipate a new ministry. We pray for Mr Thompson, for his family. We pray for him as he enters into this new phase of ministry and for the congregation as they begin this new chapter in their lives.

Bless them abundantly, we pray. Let your spirit, we pray, work amongst them in days to come and add to your people there and to your professing church. And we ask, Lord, for that community and that that ministry will indeed have much effect positively through the gospel.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would bless us now and continue with us. Hear us in this our prayer and cleanse us from all our sin. For Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen. Now, children, today we're looking at this question.

Last week we asked the question, what is it that makes a person beautiful? Today we're asking a question, in the Bible, what kind of person is a fool?

What kind of person is a fool according to the Bible? Well, there are two ways we can answer that. First of all, Psalm 53, verse 1 says, the fool says in his heart there is no God.

[17:00] Secondly, in Luke chapter 12 and verse 20, we find God saying to somebody who didn't think about the future of eternity, of death, and of meeting with God, you fool, tonight your soul will be required of you.

So what does the Bible mean by saying people are fools? A fool is, first of all, somebody like Psalm 53 who claims that God does not exist, who denies the existence of God and therefore who tries to live life without God at all in their lives.

There are many people like that in the world. There always have been. And the psalmist was just expressing how he was aware of people like that in the world and he wanted himself to be a contrast to that, not only believing in God but believing what God actually said to him through his word.

And so that's how the Bible itself speaks about a fool, a person who lives in denial of God. How do we know God's existence? Well, the Bible again tells us we know his existence actually from the creation.

if you put your finger into some plasticine or something like that that will leave the impression of your finger in it, it will leave the mark of your finger in that.

[18:23] And we can say that in the creation, in the universe, in the world around us as well as the larger creation, planets and so on, well, the Bible tells us that actually the fingerprints of God are in that.

the worlds were created by the word of God. That's how Genesis begins. That's how the Bible begins. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And they have certain characteristics that tell us that they were created by God. For example, the placement of the earth in our solar system.

It's just exactly the right distance from the sun. It moves around the sun so that you have the four seasons of the year and that itself tells you there's some special mind behind such an arrangement. The creation tells us that God exists. But secondly, in Luke chapter 12, we find somebody there who just lived for this world.

[19:31] He was somebody who was very prosperous. He was a farmer. A farmer, he had lots of crops and he had a good return on his harvest. And so he said, I'm going to just lay back and relax a wee bit.

I'm going to build bigger barns so that I can have more of this in the future. And I'll just say to my soul, soul, just relax. You're doing well. And the future is sure for you.

And God said to him, you fool. Tonight, like your soul will be required of you, then whose shall those things be for which you have worked? You see, God was saying to him, you haven't thought about death.

You haven't thought about meeting me. You haven't thought about living for me and with me in your life. And that's one of the things we've been looking at in Ecclesiastes.

And we'll finish, God willing, that study this morning. But Ecclesiastes was telling us we cannot live life as if God did not exist because if we do, there'll be lots of problems.

[20:33] We'll have lots of problems as Christians as well. But at least we know that God is in charge of our lives. And here is something for you children always to remember as well. It's not just that God exists, but he exists in the way that he tells us about himself in his word.

So, Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 6 says that whoever believes in God, whoever comes to God must believe that he exists and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

In other words, it's not just believing that God exists, that there is a being such as God. What the Bible is telling us is we have to believe what God says about himself.

And what he says about himself is especially precious when you think about Jesus, the Son of God, that he came into the world, that he came to die on the cross so that we might be saved from our sins.

That is God actually showing himself to be God and showing himself telling us what he's like. That he's a God who will have us to be saved and not to be lost.

[21:48] And then we live not for the present life like the person in Luke chapter 12 because the chapter goes on. If you read it later on you can see that it went on to speak about being prepared for the coming of Jesus because Jesus is coming back on the last day, the day of judgment,

whenever that will be, we don't know.

But the chapter went on to say not only must we believe that God exists and live for God but be prepared always thinking about and preparing to meet with Jesus when he comes.

And that means having Jesus himself as our saviour, as the one in whom we are safe when God comes in his judgment. So let's say the Lord's Prayer together.

Let's pray it together. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

[ 23 : 00 ] For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. We're going to turn now to the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 12.

Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and reading the last two verses there verses 13 and 14. The end of the matter.

All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil.

So we're coming to as it happens for the moment at least to be a final study in our travelling through the book of Ecclesiastes.

We've been following Ecclesiastes the writer of Ecclesiastes in what we see as a search for the meaning of life the purpose for human life and that route that we've been led on by Ecclesiastes has actually taken us past many sites if we can put it that way different ways in which he speaks about life as we know it under the sun life in this world the various events and experiences of human life and we've gone past these sites these scenes if you like in the journey and now it's come to the end of the journey he's come to the terminus the train has reached its final destination and this is the conclusion this is what he has concluded from his search this is the end of the matter this is what it's all been leading to what is it it says fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil in other words he's come to the end of the search and we've come to that end of the journey with him and he's arrived at one important conclusion and the one conclusion he's arrived at the sum of it all the end result of it all is this fear God and keep his commandments it's a two-fold conclusion it involves the fear of God and keeping his commandments and as we'll see these two are very closely and separately indeed joined together so that's the first thing but secondly there are two supporting considerations to that one conclusion and the two considerations are for this is the whole duty of man first of all and then secondly for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil these are the two supporting considerations that he's providing for this one conclusion that he's arrived at so let's look at the conclusion first of all then we'll come to look at these two supporting considerations the end of the matter all has been heard fear God and keep his commandments now when you think about this phrase the fear of God we've seen it already appearing in Ecclesiastes occasionally although he hasn't gone into it in any great detail the fear of God as it's used in the Bible the phrase is used in two ways sometimes it has to do with the idea of really being afraid sometimes even terror as you think about

[ 26 : 38 ] God and his judgment of sin the way he rightly needs and does judge sin that he is the judge of sin therefore he's the judge of ourselves as sinners and often the Bible brings out a sense of being afraid of that having a terror of that indeed thinking about who God is and what the judgment of God is about secondly the second way in which it's used indeed we'll see the main way today is the idea of reverence for God all at the majesty and the presence and the love of God and indeed every aspect of what God has revealed of himself to live in the fear of God is to live in respect and honour and awe and love for this God that's the second way in which the fear of God the phrase is used in the Bible and the first sense of it being afraid of God and his judgment of sin well it's something that we have every right to be afraid of God when that is actually fitting and right when there's reason to be afraid and today if we actually don't have our sins forgiven if we've not come to

God with them if we haven't placed our trust our confidence in Jesus then that's giving us reasons to be afraid because we have to face the judgment of God and the judgment of God is already upon us and upon our sin and so we need of course to come to Jesus so that that judgment is dealt with in him as we'll see in a moment so there's that emphasis on being afraid of God and it's wrong to say that that has absolutely no role whatever in a Christian mind in the thinking of a Christian yes

we know that we're not going to be condemned as Christians as saved people with those who will be condemned but that doesn't mean that the idea of the fear of God or every semblance of being afraid of God is utterly removed from our mind because when you think today of what it is for God to judge sin there's something in your mind even as a believer that cringes at the prospect of that even if you know it's not something that's going to be applied to yourself that's obvious from the Bible for example in Psalm 119 remember this is a believer this is a man of God this is somebody who fears God in the proper sense as well of loving God and having respect for God but he's actually saying here in verse 120 my flesh trembles for fear of you and I am afraid of your judgments there's a man of God there's a believer there's somebody who knows God as a saving God and yet he's saying this there's an element in which he thinks about God's judgment of sin and he begins to tremble at the prospect of that even though he knows that he himself is in a right relationship with God and if you think well that's okay for the Old Testament but surely that's gone with the coming of Christ and with us coming to know the spirit of God living within us as Christians surely that Old Testament way of thinking about God is gone well is it well it's not because when you come to the New Testament you find Paul saying something similar when he says in Philippians in chapter 2 you find this in verses 12 and 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure in other words God is working within you that enables you to work out your salvation but he says it's with fear and trembling you have something similar in 1 Peter where Peter is saying again to believers he's actually saying in chapter 1 and verse 17 he's speaking about the holiness of God and God calling his people to himself and he says if you call on him as father he's saying you're calling on him as father you know him as a loving father you're calling on him as a father if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your sojourn or your exile knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers in other words you've been ransomed you've been saved but fear has not gone out the window in this sense of being afraid as you think of God's judgment of sin it's not going to apply to you personally saying to them nevertheless when you think about sin and when you think of what sin deserves when you think of God's judgment of sin there's that element of fear still attached to that that's one way of looking at the fear of God but that's not the predominant way in which the dominant way in which we think of the fear of God as it's expressed in the Bible because it's the second meaning of it that really especially fills it out and dominates the Christian's thinking the believer's life the dominant element in the fear of God is living in awe of God and respect of God in a loving reverence for God in a loving honouring of God for all that he is for all that he has revealed himself to be for the majesty for the grandeur for the immensity of his being for his salvation for his works for everything that you know of God from scripture you live in awe you live in respect you live in reverence you live in love for that God that is the fear of God that is predominantly the controlling sense of the fear of God as you find it in a Christian's heart it's that sense of God's presence of his majesty of his love but it's a controlling feature it brings you to live that is the basis of living for God and living to depend upon God you see the fear of God this this this positive controlling sense of his presence and his majesty and his love this respect for him this awe for him that's really the basis of your dependence upon him you wouldn't come to depend upon God simply for being afraid of him in his punishment of sin in his judgment of sin that never of itself brings you to actually respect God to live for God judgment of itself does not create obedience does not create dependence upon God does not create a desire to please him it doesn't create this sense of being obligated to him to serve him lovingly but the fear of God and awe and reverence and respect that certainly underlies your dependence your desire to please him and your desire to serve him so the fear of God is predominantly that and this is what he's saying this is the end of the matter fear God respect God live in awe of him live in obedience to him because that's the next thing keep his commandments and that's not just added as a kind of secondary thing it's actually inseparable from the fear of God because obedience to God which of course means keeping his commandments giving respect to his commandments well that itself is rooted in the fear of God the fear that respects God that wants to honour God that lives in reverence to God that's the ground that's the foundation if you like for obedience for our obedience to God we respect him and therefore our response to God and respect is that we live in obedience to him one of the great examples of living in the fear of God in the Bible is the person of Abraham when you go back to Genesis and you read about the life of Abraham all the way through

Abraham's life you can see the fear of God in action in his life awe and respect and love for God think of for example when he was on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22 where he was required by God commanded by God to give Isaac up as a sacrifice to God and he went through with that until the moment when he was just about to put his son to death the angel of the Lord appeared and God spoke to him through the angel

Abraham Abraham he stopped him at that moment and he said now I know that you fear God seeing you were not seeing you were prepared to give up your son your only son that's how he put it God said to him now I know that you fear me now I know that you have respect for me now I can see that your claim to be a believer has actually been proved by your obedience to my command to sacrifice your son now I know that you fear God you see this is the way it was Abraham obeyed God because he feared God because of the reverence and the awe that he had for God as his God it wasn't the other way about he didn't fear God because he had obeyed him he obeyed him because he feared him because he respected him and you'll find the same indeed in the practicalities of Abraham's life in Genesis 13 you find an account there of how he and his nephew Lot as they were travelling came to a certain place and it was the valley of the Jordan beautifully watered nice lush ground good for the for the the animals they had with them and Abraham said to Lot you choose you choose where you want to settle take your people take your your goods take your cattle you choose and of course

[ 37 : 16 ] Abraham chose Lot chose the best looking place it didn't actually happen to be the best at the end of it all because he was living in the vicinity of Sodom but this is what Abraham actually said to him Abraham in his generosity said to him you choose I'll leave it to you you take whatever you want and I'll just have something else then why did Abraham do that how could Abraham be so unselfish so unconcerned for himself because he feared God and people who fear God have no need to be mean or stingy in the way they treat others Abraham's thinking was well I fear God I know who God is I value him as God I respect him as God I live in obedience to him as God if Lot takes the best out of the land so what God is still going to look after me that was his thinking that's the thinking of someone who lives in the fear of God that's why he was unselfish that's why he was obedient to God that's why he lived in the fear of God that's why that's why because he lived in the fear of God so there is the conclusion the end of the matter all has been heard fear God and keep his commandments in other words here's Ecclesiastes saying we've come on this journey and this is the antidote this is the alternative

God is giving us to vanity of vanities that's where the journey began vanity of vanities says the preacher all is vanity under the sun you cannot in other words find a purpose for human life under the sun the fear of God it's been mentioned before chapter 3 verse 14 chapter 5 verse 7 chapter 8 verse 12 and now chapter 12 verse 13 the writer has known this all along he's not just suddenly discovered this as he's come to this part of the book he's known this all along but he's been taking us on this journey so that we can be convinced as he is convinced that the purpose for human life cannot be found without God and leaving God out of the picture simply will not do human life under the sun is pretty much meaningless he's saying but when you bring God into the picture then it begins to make sense and even if we can't understand it all at least we can understand this that the best way as we'll see now of being human is to live in the fear of God there's his one single conclusion this is where the journey has come to an end this is what he's now bringing out as we've followed him on this journey and he's coming now to show us this so that we will be convinced about this he's mentioned it as we said earlier we've seen if you like as the train has gone through all these stations sometimes you've just seen a glimpse of the fear of God and these verses have mentioned throughout these chapters but now he's reaching the terminus there it is before us there it is in its fullness there it is highlighted if you like the lights are on it's showing up this final terminus the sign above it is saying this is the name of this station fear God and keep his commandments because that's the alternative the positive the wonderful alternative to life under the sun and that's how the two supporting considerations because he says for this is the whole duty of man for God will bring every deed into judgment first of all he's saying this is the whole duty of man now in the Hebrew text of the Bible the word duty doesn't actually appear it's there in translation but actually what it says literally is this is the whole of man and that really tells us something very important which if you use the word duty it kind of loses this important thrust of meaning or the power of the words what it's really saying this is mankind this is the essence of being human this is what it means to be human this is really the heart of the purpose for which human beings exist this

is God's design for us this is what we were created for this is the whole man this is mankind this is what it means to be human to fear God and keep his commandments you see how it all fits together now this is the one conclusion but this is the first supporting argument this is what we were created for this is the whole man this is mankind this is our essence this is what we exist for what is the most complete way what is the best way to be human to express our humanness well the world will tell you as you very well know the world especially from its secularist point of view or atheistic or humanistic point of view the world will say the way to express your humanity is just to be yourself be who you want to be be proud of who you are be proud of what your thinking says about yourself be proud of living your life without the restrictions that others want to impose upon you especially restrictions such as religion or the bible will want to impose upon you that's the best way to be human the world out there the secularism of our day will say the best way to be human is just to leave God out of the picture all together let's take God out of our schools out of the teaching of our children let's take God out of our higher education let's take God out of our political considerations let's take God out of how we view society let's take God out of our manifestos let's take God out of everything in public life that will be the best expression of mankind of humanity Ecclesiastes is telling us absolutely wrong this is the whole man to fear God and keep his commandments to respect God to respect God to live in awe of God to treat God as he deserves to be treated that's the whole of man that's how it is to be human that's the most complete and best way the only way you might say of being human expressing humanness in his wholeness that's what Ecclesiastes has led us to it is the whole of man so let's counter the idea that it is actually best after all to throw religion aside I'm not saying it's the same thing to be religious as it is to be a believer or to be in awe of respect of God I'm not talking about formality of religion we're talking about living in the fear of God positive believing respect for God that's what he says is the whole of man that's what

God's design for us is and the moment we think of taking him out of public life or private life we're losing the purpose of life we're losing sight of the end for which we were created that's his first supporting argument then and the second one is for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether it's good or evil you notice he's saying this twice every deed every secret thing God will bring it into judgment and that of course connects you with the fear of God and the reference I made to that that element still there thinking of God's judgment of sin brings a sense of being afraid of God and respect for God in that way too but what he's saying is that there are no exceptions there are no exceptions for the whole of humanity when we come under the judgment of God he will bring every deed with every secret thing for every person under judgment second corinthians 5 verse 10 tells us that we must all appear before the judgment seat of

[ 45 : 58 ] Christ by that all he means all living human beings and we mustn't think that judgment is itself always condemnation sometimes the word judgment is used in the bible with that sense but judgment is more to do with the process of examination that God carries out and especially the final judgment at the judgment when Christ comes to judge the world when we're arranged before the judgment seat of Christ the judgment is the process of examination the outcome will either be condemnation or approval and which of these two will be our experience depends on our relation with Jesus the death that Jesus died on the cross that is God's condemnation on sin that's what

Jesus actually took to himself he's already taken that to himself so when you come to trust in him when you come to receive him and accept him into your life as your savior when you come to be found in Christ as Paul says there is as he says in Romans 8 verse 1 there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus that's why he died to deliver us from God's condemnation that was rightly upon us for our sins and when we come through the judgment and to the judgment of God for all of us who are in Christ there will be no condemnation there will be judgment there will be a process of examination but God will be viewing us in Christ in his righteousness having taken condemnation to himself it no longer applies to us make sure today please make sure that you're in Christ that you have received him that you've accepted him that you have taken this wonderful loving offer of God in the gospel to have this saviour as your saviour to have all your hopes founded on him to live in obedience to him to live in a loving respect and awe of God through Jesus

Christ because otherwise you will be condemned and I will if our faith is not in Christ if our hope is not settled in Christ if we don't have himself if we don't know him as our saviour and have received him and founded our life upon him we will be condemned with all the rest who will be condemned by

God that's not popular it's not something we'll get the thanks of the world for saying but it's God's truth it's God speaking to our hearts it's God actually telling us this is how I see it this is how it will be this is the conclusion of the whole matter

God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing nothing will be hidden all the things that have happened in this world that have not been dealt with thus far all the injustices all the big as well as the small injustices everything that people have done that as far as this world is concerned they've escaped justice from well that's going to be brought before God before ourselves on that day of judgment if your heart and my heart doesn't have an element of fear the prospect of that we've never really understood what sin is or who God is even if we are Christians today the thought of God's judgment is something that still gives us some element of fear in thinking of what it's about even if we know that in Christ we're not going to be condemned that that judgment is going to approve us in Christ's righteousness and therefore say as Jesus himself said in Matthew 25 come you blessed of my father come and inherit the kingdom whereas on the other hand he says to the others depart from me you wicked and so tonight today that's at all times that's God's that's God's teaching through the gospel of these important things so we got on the train at Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 1 we're now stepping off it at chapter 12 and verse 15 sometimes it might have appeared that the journey felt as long as the trans-Siberian express maybe at times but this is the end of the matter we've reached the end of the journey what are we taking from the sights that we've seen under the sun and especially from this final terminus that he's reached well let me put it in the words of Spurgeon it wasn't a comment on this particular book or chapter but Spurgeon commented elsewhere this is what he said and this is what we'll conclude with I think this really sums up everything we've seen on the journey and what we've come to see now at the end of the journey Spurgeon said this nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the creator as much as when we learn the emptiness of everything else and that's what

[ 52 : 11 ] Ecclesiastes has surely taught you and me nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the creator use the words of chapter 12 verse 1 nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the creator especially the creator in Christ as much as when we learn the emptiness of everything else may God bless these thoughts and these studies of his word we're going to conclude now singing in Psalm 111 this is from the Scottish Psalter Psalm 111 and it's verses 6 to 10 he did the power of his works unto his people show when he the heathen's heritage upon them did bestow his handiworks are truth and right all his commands are sure and done in truth and uprightness they ever more endure we'll sing to the tune

Paisley that's Psalm 111 at verse 6 he did the power of his works and to his people show expressly when he owed as he told some it was so his handiworks works are truth and right, all his commands are sure, and done in truth and uprightness they evermore endured. He sent redemption to his folk, whose covenant foray, he did command holy his name, and reverend his away. Wisdom's beginning is God's fear, good understanding they have all that his commands fulfil, his praise and jers foray.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen. Our thanks to you once again for joining with us in this service. We trust that God will continue to bless his word to you. Do please, if you can, join us this evening again at 6.30 the service will be conducted by Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod. Thank you and keep safe.

Let's take a look at theman. Thank you. We have another opportunity to witnessance that you ask to follow us. Thank you.

See you. What do you want to tell us to be?