

A Living Dog is Better than a Dead Lion

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Date: 22 November 2020

[0 : 00] Good morning everybody and welcome to our service today from Stornoway. We trust that you are keeping safe and well and that we will know together God's blessing as we come to worship him together this morning.

A couple of intimations first of all as was intimated before last week. The next prayer meeting this Wednesday is actually going to be in the seminary but we will run a zoom along with that.

So we are going to be using the seminary for the first time since the Covid restrictions came into place. So we pray about that and the limited number present there and we will still be able to see those on zoom and likewise those on zoom will be able to join with us in that service.

The other thing is there will be a collection for the Salvation Army. We do this annually at this time of year and Elaine McMillan this year again is organising it.

She wants to announce that she and Lizzie will be in charge of the hall on Saturday 28th and Monday 30th of November both these days 28th and 30th from 9am to 5pm.

[1 : 22] For anyone who wants to drop off donations for the Salvation Army. We appreciate that this time of year especially this year many people are facing hardship and whatever help we can give with that will be very very welcome.

The Salvation Army this year has asked for specifically for Christmas treats for families such as tins, boxes of biscuits and sweets, chocolates, Christmas cakes, family board games or toys.

That's what they are focusing on this year so if you can help with that please just contact Elaine or Lizzie or just go to the hall on the Saturday 28th or Monday 30th from 9am to 5pm.

Everything will be arranged there in the hall for that collection. We are going to begin our worship now and we are going to sing firstly this morning from Psalm 31.

Psalm 31 and sing Psalms, that's page 36 of your Psalm books. I am singing verses 3 to 8, the tune is Malcolm. You are my fortress and my rock.

[2 : 23] For your name's sake be my sure guide. Preserve me from the trap that's set. You are the refuge where I hide. Psalm 31 verses 3 to 8.

Psalm 31 verses 3 to 8. You are my fortress and my rock. For your name's sake be my sure guide. Reserve me from the trap that's set. You are the refuge where I hide.

Redeemer me, Lord, O God of truth. My spirit I commit to you.

I hate all those who trust false gods. I trust the Lord for he is true.

[3 : 31] I will rejoice and take delight in all the love that you have shown.

For my affliction you have seen, to you my soul's distress is known.

You have not left me to my foe or given me into his hand, but you have set my feet within a spacious place where I may stand.

Now we're going to read from the Word of God. The first reading today is from Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, chapter 12 and from verse 15.

Proverbs 12 at verse 15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

[4 : 53] The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy. No ill befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly. The hand of the diligent will rule, while the sloth will be put to forced labor.

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

[5 : 57] Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth. In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

Amen, and we pray once again that God will bless his word to us. We're going to engage now in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Lord our God, we give thanks as we come before you in this way today.

We give thanks for the opportunity to worship you together. We give thanks for the knowledge you have given us of your worthiness to be worshipped. We pray, Lord, that while we are apart physically, yet, O Lord, able to join together in this way, we ask that you would bless us with your presence.

We pray that you would come into our homes, into our hearts, into our minds, that you come into our thoughts today, so that we may be enlightened by your Spirit.

We pray that you would enter into all that we are inwardly and spiritually. And enable us, Lord, we pray, to know of your presence with us, even while we are separate physically from each other.

[7 : 11] We give thanks for the binding effect of your Spirit, your Spirit that is not limited in any way as we are limited. Your Spirit that is able to penetrate into closed doors and homes and buildings.

We thank you, Lord, for your own resurrection power through that Spirit, by which you come to quicken your people, by which you come to sustain life within them, by which you give them a living hope that you keep sustained through your Spirit and through your Word.

We pray today, Lord, that your Spirit will be known to us, that you will make yourself known in our experience, that we may truly rejoice in your presence, that we may mourn over our sins, and come before you in that spirit of penitence, by which we would bring our sins before you, seeking that you would wash us and make us clean, and create a clean heart within us, a new and living heart, so that we will seek, O Lord, if we have not already, that we will seek after you and come to know you as our God, our Redeemer, our Friend.

We pray for all your people today who know you already as their God and Saviour. We ask, O Lord, that you would bless them throughout the world in these difficult times.

We pray that your Church, Lord, your cause will be strengthened. We pray that your Holy Spirit will today take your Word and make it effective in our experience, giving us further resources by which we would be able to further testify for you in the presence of the world.

[8 : 47] We ask that you will bless us, Lord, here as a congregation, and all who are joined with us today in services of worship. We give thanks, O Lord, for all that you have been to us, for all that you continue to be to us, as our God, as our Redeemer, as our Saviour.

We ask, O Lord, that as we know of you in times gone by, in the history of the congregation, in our own history, in our lives, in our experience in the past, bless to us today, Lord, this new day.

Your mercies are new each morning. Great is your faithfulness. And so, Lord, as we echo these words that are written for us in your Word, we come, Lord, today to seek in our own experience that they may indeed be true and that we may relish them.

We pray that you bless your Word to us once again as we look into it for its teaching. We pray that you may be laid upon our hearts, we pray, O Lord. Give us to be thankful and to rejoice in the fact that you have given us this revelation in advance of eternity and for our lives in the course of this world.

Give us, we pray, to apply it today to our own hearts and to our situations in life, whatever they may be. We thank you that you took account of our human lives and as your Word was set in the way that it now is.

[10 : 11] That all our experiences, even if we are beyond our understanding in many ways, yet, Lord, we know the principles and the precepts by which we should live our life.

For they are all set out for us in your Word. We thank you, too, for the way your Word so clearly mentions and directs us in the way of salvation. And that there is no truth that is essential for us to know for our salvation that you have not revealed and made plain in your Word.

We ask, O Lord, today especially that your Word will truly be throughout the world blessed to the saving of many people. We pray again that you would bless us, Lord, at this time as a people in our nation and in the nations of the world.

And once again, O Lord, we bring before you our circumstances with the COVID pandemic. Lord, it's so obvious to us that these are issues which are greater than ourselves and much more than we ourselves can eradicate or even surmount.

We pray that as we seek your help, that you would continue, Lord, to give your help and guidance to those who lead us at this time. We pray for those in government.

[11 : 28] Once again, we pray for our governments. We pray for them that you would continue to guide them and uphold them and strengthen them and give them wisdom and give them the light that they need, O Lord, to lead us as a people.

We pray for those who are seeking a vaccine. We give thanks for the encouragement in recent days in regard to this and pray that that may continue, that that will prove to be effective, Lord, in dealing with this virus.

And as we look to times past when pandemics affected the world, we know that you gave skills then to many people so that vaccines and measures were made available that dealt with the situation. We pray to you now that you would, Lord, do the same for us at this time. We continue, Lord, to bear in mind and to pray for those who have lost loved ones over this and also through other reasons for death.

We pray that you would bless those who mourn today, those who miss loved ones, those who dearly wish that they were able still to be with them but know that they cannot be.

[12 : 34] We pray, Lord, that you would bless all who feel lonely and isolated and closed in even within their homes. And we ask that you would bless all who care for us at this time in our communities, in our health service, in our hospitals, in the care homes.

We pray, Lord, for all of these and all likewise who help us that you would be pleased to bless these measures to us and bless all who are involved in it. Shelter us, we pray, as we were singing, under your own protection.

Give us in your guidance that we may be steered in the right way, in the way of the righteous. And we ask all of this, Lord, seeking that you would bless us as a generation. Bless our children today. We thank you for them. And for all who are participating, Lord, in the service, we give thanks for their interest in these things of God. We pray that you would bless the Sunday School. We give thanks for the way that it is being made available in a way that is suitable for us at this time.

And we ask that you bless those Sunday School leaders, that you would bless them all as they so willingly and wonderfully provide for the children. And bless this means, we pray, that you have opened up for us.

[13 : 48] And so we ask that you would now continue to be with us. Hear us in our prayers. Accept us freely, we pray. Cleanse us from all our sin. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. All right, children, we're looking at some of the I Am sayings of Jesus. And we've come today to look at words in John chapter 11, which speaks of, or Jesus speaks of himself as the resurrection and the life.

This is an incident where he met with two sisters who had lost their brother Lazarus. He had died shortly before this. And one of them, Martha, when she came to meet Jesus, she said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

And Jesus then said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Matthew, in John 11, chapter 11 and verse 25. I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Now, the miracles that Jesus did while he was in this world were always indications or signs of who he was and what he was able to do and why he had come into the world.

[15 : 08] There were always signs of the kind of person he was, that he was the son of God, that he had this power, and that he was especially one who had come to save. And when you come here, the miracle of bringing Lazarus back from the dead, which you read about further on in the chapter, that itself was a way that showed the truth of what he's saying here in verse 25, when he said, I am the resurrection and the life.

When he came to the sepulcher or the grave of Lazarus, he did say then, in powerful words, Lazarus came out. And that's what happened. This amazing miracle, this man who had been dead for four days, and when Jesus spoke these words, Lazarus came out.

And that was one of the ways, the main way here, by which Jesus showed that what he said in verse 25 was true about himself. That he is the resurrection and the life.

Resurrection is when someone comes back from the dead, which we know is going to happen at the end of the world, when Jesus comes back again. He's going to raise the bodies of his people, all those who died all through the years, and they're going to be raised from the dead, to be joined to

their souls again, to go to be with Jesus forever after that.

And here he is saying, I am the resurrection and the life. But you notice what he's saying also next. Whoever believes in me and lives in me shall never die.

[16:42] When you believe in Jesus, when you put your trust in Jesus, when you have faith in Jesus, it actually joins you to him and the power that is in him over death.

The only way that we can actually overcome death, the only way that we can come to defeat death in our own lives, is to trust in Jesus.

Because when you come to be trusting in Jesus, you're joined to him. Even though he's in heaven, you come to be joined to him spiritually. And everything we need to receive by way of spiritual life comes from Jesus through that joining of us to him.

And that's what happens when we believe. Seems very simple, doesn't it? Really. If I come to believe in Jesus and accept Jesus as my saviour, what I'm doing is being, what happens then is that I'm being joined to this Jesus so that his power comes into my life.

And even though I'm going to die, whenever that may be, whenever you may die, being joined to Jesus means that your life is safe in the hands of Jesus.

[17:58] And that's why he asked this question then after he said this to Martha, everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. And then it says this, do you believe this?

And she said, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who's coming into the world. In other words, he's asking you and he's asking me today, doesn't matter what age we've reached in the world, young or old, do you believe this?

Have you come to believe in Jesus, to trust in him? And if so, this is true of you as well. And I hope it is of all of you children today that you are already believing in Jesus and trusting in Jesus so that being joined to Jesus, you'll be amongst those who have victory over death already and will come to show that when it comes to the resurrection from the dead.

God bless these words to us. Let's say the Lord's Prayer again together. Amen. 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.

[19:19] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Let's turn now to read God's Word again, this time from the book of Ecclesiastes.

We're going to continue our studies in Ecclesiastes today and we've come to chapter 9. And we're going to read chapter 9 and verses 1 to 10. But all this I laid to heart examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God.

Whether it is love or hate, man does not know, both are before him. It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.

As is the good, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all.

Also the hearts of the children of man are full of evil and madness as in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

[20:43] For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten, their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

Go, eat your bread, enjoy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white, let not oil be lacking on your head.

Enjoy life with a wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life, and your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going.

And we pray God will bless this portion of his word to us today as we turn now to look at it briefly together. B.B. Warfield, a famous theologian and expositor of God's word in America, wrote the following, The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lit.

[22 : 05] The introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before, but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it that was only dimly or not even at all perceived before.

Thus, the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it but only extended and enlarged.

That's a wonderful description of how the Old Testament has not revealed as fully the things that you find in the New Testament especially to do with the coming of Christ, the person of Christ, the Trinity that God is, all these things that have been more fully revealed in the New Testament. But what Warfield said was they're actually there in the Old Testament as well. They existed then. They were revealed in a measure. Nothing in the New Testament has added to what is already true of God and of his salvation.

As Warfield said, it just extended it and enlarged it. And that's true of Ecclesiastes as well because as we've been seeing, Ecclesiastes actually brings us to certain things which we wish there was more information about.

[23 : 20] But then we have to remember that it's part of the Bible, God's Word, which we take in its entirety to be God's Word. It is a unit of revelation so that you would expect things in the likes of Ecclesiastes to be more fully and clearly dealt with in the New Testament.

Even then, it doesn't provide an answer, of course, to every question. In other words, Ecclesiastes, as we've seen already, in fact, is saying to us that the search for the meaning of life, search for a purpose to human life, is really at many times a struggle.

But in that struggle, the burden of Ecclesiastes is that as we come to use other scriptures and the light of the New Testament especially, so we learn to trust in God.

The more we understand that we don't know so much as we'd like, the more we learn to trust in Him. And it reminds us too that our Christian life, the Christian life, is not a destination.

We haven't reached our destination when we come to Christ and to know Christ. We come to start a journey then. That journey will bring us to a destination in heaven if our trust is in Christ.

[24 : 37] But on the way there, there are many stops. Many stops in which we have to take account of what God is saying to us in providence and also in His Word especially.

And as we come to these stops, so we come to assimilate or try and put together more fully in our understanding what God is actually saying to us in His Word.

So here in this chapter, we'll find our sermon heading in verse 4b. A living dog is better than a dead lion.

Imagine the attention you'd get if you put that car sticker on your car. A living dog is better than a dead lion. Many people would look at that and say, what on earth does that mean?

Why is he putting that on his car? Well, the dogs in those days, of course, were not like lovely little pets that you have today or big pets as well, domesticated dogs.

[25 : 37] The dogs that you find mentioned often in the Bible were the kind of dogs you'd find in the streets in those days. Scavengers, really mangy things, very unattractive, indeed dangerous things, carrying all sorts of diseases and that's why they're not spoken of very kindly.

Very different to the dog that you have if you've got a pet dog such as we have here. The dog he's mentioning here is the dogs that would really not be wanted near your home or near yourself at all. But the lion, of course, is the king of the beasts. What is he really saying here? Well, the lion is the top animal and it's admired for its strength and for the fact that it's really at the top of the food chain if you like.

But what he's saying is what good is that if it's dead? What good is that if it can't contribute anything? Whereas even the dog, though it's not very well liked, at least while it lives it can do something.

What he's really saying to us as we'll see now as we expand the chapter up a bit, as we open it out a bit, what he's really saying to us make the most of life when you have the opportunities and the advantages that life gives you.

[26 : 49] And this is so true of us, especially under the gospel. Make the most of that opportunity of that life that you have now because you cannot do any of that when you're dead. When you go beyond the grave, into the grave, and Sheol really there means life beyond death.

Sheol in the Old Testament doesn't really often distinguish between hell and heaven. It just simply means the region beyond. What is beyond this life without really distinguishing it.

And what it's saying here is you cannot actually contribute from there to anything that's done in this life, in this world. There's the burden of the passage today.

Make the most of the life you have while you have it, while you have the opportunities, while you have the strength, while you have the mind, while you have the ability, while you have your faculties, because you cannot when they're gone and especially when we've died.

So two headings. First of all, where there are humans, there is death. Seems very obvious, but that's really what it's saying to us and we'll see why. Where there are humans, there is death.

[27 : 59] That's the first point. And notice how he says in the beginning of the chapter, What he's really saying is everything in the lives of both the righteous, the righteous, the wise, are the same people.

Their deeds are in the hand of God. Their service is entirely governed by the sovereignty of God. And the reason he's saying that is that the same things really happen providentially in the lives of the wise, the righteous, as in the lives of the wicked.

Verse two there, It is the same for all since the same event happens, or the same things happen, to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not.

As is the good, so also is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun that the same event or the same events happen to all.

In other words, what he's saying to us is as you look out over life, if you want to try and assess where somebody is in their relation with God and being in the hands of God, everyone is in the hands of God, and yet you see, he's saying, things happen in the lives of those who say that they trust in God and those who are not interested in that, but the same events are found in the lives of both.

[29 : 29] It takes you back, really, to chapter 8. Remember last time we saw how he's saying there, there's a vanity that takes place on earth, in verse 14, 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.

In other words, if you were going to try and find who is a Christian, who is accepted with God, and who is not, you don't come to a conclusion about that in the events of their lives, in what happens to them, in the things that you see in God's providence toward them.

That's really what he's saying in verse 1 here, whether it's love or hate. There are deeds that are in the hands of God, whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Both are before him.

Now that means love or hate on the part of God, not our love and our hate. What he's saying is whether we're acceptable to God or not acceptable to God, whether he accepts us or rejects us, is not something you can find out from the events in a person's life.

Lifestyle, yes, the fruits of their life, yes, but in the things that happen to them in the course of life, the experiences they have to go through, that itself does not determine who is and isn't righteous, accepted with God or not.

[30 : 51] and in addition to that, he says, also, he says in verse 3, verse 3, also, all the hearts of the children of man are full of evil and madness as in their hearts when they live and after that they go to the dead.

You look out over the world and you say, what do you see? You see sin, you see madness, you see stupidity, you see people full of bad intentions and things they do to each other.

you cannot deduce from that who is and isn't acceptable. God, the world does not give you that accurate information. And so, is God our friend or our foe?

Well, he's saying you can't actually answer that question by simply looking at the events that they have to go through in life. Remember that Jesus at one time was asked the question about somebody who was born blind in John chapter 9.

And who sinned? Was it this man or his parents? And Jesus immediately responded saying, you're actually making a grievous mistake. It's neither.

[31 : 56] You don't actually deduce from a person's life what sort of things have led to that. If you see a person, for example, Job going through great suffering, well, his friends, his companions came along and said to him, look, there must be something drastically wrong in your life between yourself and God and you've got to put that right.

And Job knew that they weren't speaking truthfully, that they didn't know his situation. And that's what we've got to be careful about too. We cannot draw our conclusions from what you see happening in a person's life.

There may be something in that person's life that leaves them with that exterior that they're showing or there may be nothing in their life at all that has to do with the suffering they're going through. What he's saying is this is not something you can actually determine. Where there are humans there is death. Where there are humans there is suffering. Where there are humans there are a variety of experiences.

Both the righteous and the wicked experience them. So you've got to go beyond that to find whether or not a person is accepted with God. And that, of course, as the New Testament puts it, by their fruits you shall know them.

[33 : 11] By the way they live you know them. How they conduct themselves in these events is how you know them. And that's where you go to the New Testament to find more information about it.

So where there is where there are humans there is death. But he says then where there is life there is hope. It's our second heading. Where there is life there is hope.

Now verses 4 to 6 you could say really deal with the finality of death. death. What he's doing is, as we've seen, making a distinction between a living dog and a dead lion.

What he says, the living know that they will die but the dead know nothing. They are forgotten. The memory of them is forgotten. Of course, he's not saying here that we don't remember those who have died and are no longer with us.

Of course we do. We remember them with precious memories. They're dear to us. The memory of them is dear to us. So he's not saying here in the absolute sense that those who have died are no longer remembered.

[34 : 12] That's something to bear in mind. He's not here being cynical. He's not actually dismissing the idea of remembering loved ones and going on remembering. That's important. But what he is really saying is they can no longer contribute to anything that we're doing in this life.

They have gone from the scene of time from the scene of life. Their contributions ended when the moment of their death arrived. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

It's pretty dark stuff. It's pretty negative, isn't it, up to now? You maybe have the question then in your mind, well, what's he going to make of this then?

Is he going to just tell us, well, there's no point to life at all then. You might as well just give up. Well, far from it. The very opposite, in fact, is what he's saying. Live life to the full.

The finality of death does not mean that we despair, that we just spend our time in darkness and indolence, in slothfulness, not caring and not contributing.

[35 : 23] What he's saying is the other extreme, in fact. Do as much as you can while you have the opportunity, while you have the life you have. That's what he's saying here in verse 8.

Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Now, he's not talking here, it's really giving us a principle here, which we'll see in the other three points that follow.

what he's saying here is not regarding luxuries or seeking luxuries, garments that are always white, pristine garments, best quality clothes and perfume, the most expensive perfume.

He's not saying these are the things that you have to live for. He's not referring to luxury because in the Bible, these two things, garments that are always white and oil on the head is a reference especially to joy, a reference to a joyful life, a full life.

Think, example, in Psalm 45 it's spoken there as a prophecy of Jesus, how Jesus would be one that God himself would actually anoint with the oil of gladness.

[36 : 32] Your throne is forever and ever. Therefore, God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

That's a wonderful depiction of the fullness of Jesus and the fullness of Jesus including the oil of gladness, the joy that is his, the joy that is in his salvation as well.

And you can find that Isaiah chapter 61 gives you the same emphasis there, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me. Words in Luke chapter 2 that Jesus turned to to speak about himself.

But that goes on as you read down through the chapter. that he has been anointed to do all of these things including to grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a beautiful headdress instead of

ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint or a heavy spirit.

So you can see in these few references themselves that what Ecclesiastes is telling us here is make the most of life. Not in the sense that you just live in a way that any worldly person would live and just cram your life full of worldly things.

[37 : 53] That's not what it means and it doesn't mean just living for luxuries. It means make the most of it in terms of living a life of fulfillment, of joy, of fullness of life for God, in the service of God and your fellow human beings.

And there are three things briefly that follow on from that that he tells us to enjoy and they're very practical things and there's nothing dark, there's nothing about this apart except that it's just clearly setting out for us.

Three things to enjoy and enjoy to the full while we have the opportunity. First of all, enjoy your food. Secondly, enjoy your marriage. Thirdly, enjoy your work.

enjoy your food. Verse 7, go and eat your bread and joy and drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do.

You're approved of these things. Enjoy your food. To have plenty of food is not a sin. To be gluttonous is a sin. But to have plenty of food and to enjoy it while you have it, to enjoy it in balance with other things, he's saying here, enjoy that.

[39 : 07] Make the most of that. There are many in the world today, friends, that are starving. Many in the world that don't have food or have the meager resources of food from day to day that we simply don't know about, at least most of us.

There are many in the world today who lack sufficient food. So be thankful for the food you have. Don't feel guilty about having it. Don't feel guilty about having an abundance of it.

That's the providence of God, the goodness of God that's given us this. God, he says, approves of this. Even if there are many others in the world who don't have that providence, that situation that you have, it doesn't mean that you don't make the most of it, that you don't enjoy it while you have it, that you don't give thanks to God for it and for its abundance, because it's the goodness of God that has provided that for us.

That's why we say grace before meals. That's why we give thanks to God for the food we have, asking him to bless it, asking him to make us increasingly thankful for it. But something else, and it's a blight, really, on our Western society especially, and that is the wastage of food that is so obvious in our society.

What he's saying is enjoy your food, eat your bread, enjoy, drink your wine with a merry heart, but really don't waste it. Don't throw it away, don't actually store it in such a way that you just can't deal with the abundance that you have.

[40 : 46] We have a massive food wastage in our society today, and these are not things that are inappropriate to bring up in a sermon, because they have to do with our stewards above God's resources, something the Bible is very strong about, how we should actually be careful in our stewardship and God honouring in our stewardship, and when there are so many people who have to go without food, so many people struggling at this time, in the COVID restrictions especially, so many people using food banks because they've fallen on hard times.

When you have plenty of food, when you have enough food on a daily basis, enjoy that, be thankful for that. Remember where it came from, not from Tesco, or from the Co-op, or from wherever it is we get our food.

That's where it's stored locally, that's where we buy it from, but it sources God, it sources the goodness of God. Enjoy it as his gift, enjoy his goodness in your life.

So enjoy your food, he's saying. Secondly, enjoy your marriages. He says in verse 9, enjoy life with the wife you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun.

Enjoy your marriage. Again, he's reminding us that marriages do come to an end, through death particularly, though there are other reasons sometimes why sadly marriages don't work out and come to an end.

[42 : 25] But what he's saying to us, in marriage enjoy your marriage with the wife you love. Of course, it works the other way as well, the wife with the husband to enjoy the marriage.

And there's an emphasis there on both enjoy and love because it's love that really proves to be the foundation to enjoyment. Some people say, well, the enjoyment's gone out of our marriage.

We just drifted apart, enjoyment went out of it, so there's really nothing left just to wind it up. Well, here is Ecclesiastes saying, what about the love aspect of it?

Because love is something that is costly. Love is something that you have to work at. What did Ephesians chapter five say to husbands as well as to wives, but to husbands particularly, as indeed Ecclesiastes here is addressing husbands in particular, well, he's saying, husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her.

Something I always try to emphasize at a marriage ceremony, something I always try and set before those who are coming to be married and also have been married a long time, that just as it was for Jesus, so it is for us in our marriages.

[43 : 41] There are testing times when your marriage, your relationship is tested. You have to give of yourself. You have to see it as something truly costly. Jesus actually gave himself to the death of the cross in order to be married to his church, in order to take his bride to himself and for her benefit to wash her, to make her clean, to present her to himself as a beautiful spiritual bride.

There is the example, there is the foundational example for us in our marriages. What is Ecclesiastes saying? Exactly the same as the New Testament. Enjoy life with a wife whom you love.

Make love the priority while you have it. Because I know that there are those listening today who have lost their loved one or their wife or husband and for whom life is really testing in the aftermath of that and who would dearly wish that they were able to take their husband or wife back again and enjoy the love between them that they enjoyed.

And while they know they cannot be, they are still in a sense envious at those who still have a marriage to enjoy. Enjoy your marriage.

Work at it. Put everything into it. Love especially. And when it's tested, think about the way that Jesus gives you the supreme example of commitment to his bride, commitment to a marriage.

[45 : 17] And that's always going to be our chief example. So here he's saying something the New Testament again really brings out in greater fullness. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.

Because again he's emphasizing all the days of your vain life that he has given you. Because that is your portion in life. He's reminding us of how short life is.

And even in a long marriage we see people who have been married many, many, many years. And whose love has not waned and in fact has increased.

It's a wonderful thing to see. And what he's still reminding us of is, yes, but it's still going to come to an end. So make the most of it. While you have it.

While you're in your strength. Enjoy your food. Enjoy your marriage. Enjoy your works. The third thing he says. Verse 10. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

[46 : 20] For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going. As I mentioned Sheol is the region beyond this life. And there is no contribution from there across to this side of the grave.

work. What he's saying is, while you have the opportunity, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Things of course which are good, things which are profitable.

It doesn't just say anything goes. work. We were created to work. That's one of the creation ordinances, as theologians call it, of the chapters in Genesis to do with creation.

The Sabbath, rest, work, marriage, three creation ordinances. Two of them are here, marriage and work. We were created to work.

from the moment that God established humanity, man and wife in this world. He created marriage, he created work, he created things for us to do.

[47 : 25] And so he's saying, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Whatever opportunity you have to do it, do it with all the might that you can muster.

And the New Testament, again picks that up actually in Colossians chapter three, where Paul is actually setting out some instructions there for individuals, but also for relationships and families. And in Colossians chapter three, this is what he said, among other things. Again, he's dealing with wives and husbands, interestingly, and with parents, with children as well, and parents.

But then he says in verse 23, whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. That, he says, is the secret really to an industrious life, a life that is, as Ecclesiastes is saying, enjoying work.

[48 : 29] There are many aspects of work that we don't enjoy, many things that cause us toil and pain, and he's picking that up. Your portion in your life and your toil, which you have under the sun. There's toiling in work.

There's hardship in work. There's difficulty in work. Nevertheless, he's saying, enjoy it because, as the New Testament comes to show us, you're doing it not simply to please human beings, even your boss.

You're doing it to please the Lord. You're doing it in an attitude of service to him, knowing that your service is not unto men, but unto the Lord, and that you shall receive from him the inheritance as your reward.

There are no wages like the wages that Jesus pays, because the wages are eternal life. Wages of sin is death, as Romans puts it, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. However hard things are in this life, and they are hard for some people more than others, but for all who are tied to Jesus Christ, for all who have trust in him, for all who are the righteous, as it puts it here, it's not so much about what we receive back in this life that the focus is on, but what's awaiting us in the next.

[49 : 58] And that's really what one of the commentators on Ecclesiastes that I am using, Philip Graham Ryken, in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, this is what he says about these verses.

The time is short. This makes some Christians think that we don't have time for the joyous activities described in Ecclesiastes 9. But these things still have their place in life.

In fact, the right kind of enjoyment will prove to be one of our best preparations for eternity. Our earthly pleasures are telling us that we were made for another world.

Every honest day's work brings us one day closer to our eternal rest. Every good meal is a reminder that we have been invited to the last and the best of all banquets, the marriage supper of the Lamb. And when we make Jesus foundational and central to our lives, and when he is the one that we serve in this life, above all others, that's what we anticipate.

[51 : 17] That's what's waiting for us beyond this life. Where there are humans, there is death, but while there is life, there is hope.

Make the most of it, he's saying to us. Enjoy your food, enjoy your marriage, enjoy your work. May God bless these thoughts to us.

Now we're going to conclude by singing in Psalm 37. Psalm 37 in the Scottish Psalter, that's page 255, you're using the psalm books, and verses 29 to 34.

The just inherited shall the land, and ever in it dwell. The just man's mouth doth wisdom speak, his tongue doth judgment tell. And so on verse 29 to 34, the tune is St.

Æthelreda, from verse 29, the just inherited shall the land. The just inherit shall the land, and ever in it dwell.

[52 : 33] The just man's mouth doth wisdom speak, his tongue doth judgment tell.

In his heart the lois of his God, his steps hide not away.

The wicked man doth watch the just, and seek at him to slay.

yet him the Lord will not forsake, nor leave him in his hands.

The righteous will he not condemn when he in judgment stands.

[53 : 41] We wait on the Lord and keep his way, and the exiled shall be the earth to inherit when cut off the wicked thou shalt see.

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 ever more.

Amen. Thank you sincerely once again for joining with us in this service. I trust it's been a blessed time as we've waited on the Lord, as we've looked at his word and worshipped him in praise and through prayer and preaching.

Tonight's service will be at 6.30pm and that will be led by Reverend