

The Contrasting Ending For The Wicked And The Righteous

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[0 : 00] Good evening, a very warm welcome to you all, whatever it is you're joining us from. We do wish you to be blessed and we pray that God will bless us as we come together around his word again this evening.

It's a privilege to bring you this service, this gospel message as well from Stornoway Free Church. Just one announcement to make before I begin the service. Most of the congregation will already know that we have decided to return to using the seminary building for a midweek meeting and the first of these will be on the 25th, Wednesday the 25th, we'll be returning to using the building.

Obviously there's a limit on numbers and the protocol and the directions and details are all available on website and Facebook page and if you don't have access to anybody who doesn't have access to those, you can easily get printed copies from Marianne or just phoning any of ourselves if you want to know the details.

And it's important that we keep to those because there is a certain protocol and place which we really have to be strict about as we come to return to using the seminary building.

That's a cause for rejoicing and we pray that that itself will bring further encouragement to us as a congregation. So tonight let's begin our service of worship singing first of all in Psalm 67, Psalm 67 on page 301 of the Psalm books, that's in the Scottish Psalter.

[1 : 30] And we'll sing to the tune Tiverton. Lord unto us be merciful, do thou us also bless, and graciously cause shine on us the brightness of thy face.

So on through to the end of the Psalm, the second version of Psalm 67, Lord unto us be merciful. Lord unto us be merciful, do thou us also bless, and graciously cause shine on us the brightness of thy face.

That so thy way upon the earth to all men may be known.

also among the nations of thy saving health be shown.

O let the people praise thee, Lord, let people all thee praise.

[2 : 59] O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy always.

For rightly thou shalt people judge, and nations rule on air.

Let people praise thee, Lord, let all the folk praise thee with myrrh.

Then shall the earth yield our increase, God our God bless us shall.

God shall us bless, and all the earth the ends shall fear him all.

[4 : 12] Our first reading of God's word tonight is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25. The Gospel according to Matthew 25, from verse 31 to the end of the chapter.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

[5 : 24] When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.

Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you cursed. Into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me no food.

I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me. Naked, and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison, and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?

Then he will answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Amen. May God follow with this blessing out reading that portion of his word. Let's now call upon him in prayer. Let's address our minds in prayer to God. You are God, the King, immortal, invisible, unchangeable.

[6 : 45] One who is almighty, all-powerful, all-wise, all-holy, and righteous in all that you do. We thank you, Lord, for all the attributes that belong to you, that you have revealed to us in your word.

We thank you for the perfection of them, each of them and all of them together. We bless you, O Lord, that we come to worship you as that God described in his word, who has revealed himself to us in such a wonderful way.

He has come into our darkness, the darkness caused by our sin, the darkness of this world, of this universe, and has come into it in the person of Jesus Christ, your Son.

We thank you, O Lord, that you are directing all things towards that end that you have appointed, towards your perfect judgment, of which we have been reading. We thank you that every event that takes place in the history of the world up to that moment will indeed be taken account of by you, that each individual life, known to you so minutely and perfectly, will find its own place in the way in which you administer your judgment.

We thank you, O Lord, for the security that is in the righteousness of Christ for us. We thank you that your word assures us that that righteousness is ours when we come to receive him, welcome him into our lives, and believe and trust in him as our saviour.

[8 : 27] We thank you, O Lord, for the millions today throughout the world who have come to worship you and worship you now, and paying a great heed to the words that you have given us in the Bible, and coming especially to acknowledge their indebtedness to you, that you have come to reach out toward them in salvation.

We thank you, O Lord, ourselves for your continued goodness to us, and we bless you that in that goodness you continue to keep the gospel before us through your word and through the way in which your spirit blesses it to us.

We thank you, O Lord, for all that attaches itself to the gospel by way of your own promises, that your word will not return to you empty. You accomplish all that you have purposed through your word.

Your word brings to pass your will as it is done among human beings and in the universe you have created. We thank you that your word always has a response to it that accords with your will and purpose.

We thank you tonight, Lord, for the privilege of being together in this way, though it is not as we would desire. Yet we thank you for this facility, for this medium that we can use, O Lord, to know that we are together in mind and spirit, though not in body.

[9 : 56] We thank you for every household and every individual that has joined together tonight in this service and other services like it. Lord, we pray that through your spirit, your word will be blessed to us indeed.

We ask that your blessing will continue to be with us as we anticipate and plan to come together in our midweek meetings in a week or two's time. Gracious Lord, we give thanks that you have enabled this and we pray that you would bless us as we prepare the way for it.

And we ask that you would continue, O Lord, to make provision for us during these critical times when we know that this virus is affecting so many millions in the world, so many nations throughout the earth.

O Lord, we look to you for our help, for you are the only one who has that arm of strength that your word speaks of to deliver us from such circumstances as these.

We acknowledge our dependence upon the human ability that you have yourself created. For those especially who are set on having a virus, having an antivirus prepared, and we ask that you would grant, O Lord, that that will move at pace so that it will be available safely as a vaccine to meet this COVID epidemic.

[11 : 19] Gracious Lord, we pray that as we set these things before you that we may nevertheless depend upon yourself ultimately. We pray for the nations of the world.

We have been singing, O Lord, in your praise of how our desire is that the nations will come to know you to bow in acknowledgement of your Lordship. We pray that as the gospel goes forth throughout the world that many others will hear it and value it and respond to it in the way of believing and trusting in you.

We ask that you would bring many into your kingdom even through these difficult times. We know in the past that now you have used great crises in history as circumstances by which you brought many to know yourself, by which you brought that conviction that God is above all these things in his sovereignty.

we pray that this way be so for us in these days as well. And we ask, O Lord, that you would grant your blessing so that throughout the world people may turn to the Lord out of atheism, out of other systems of belief and philosophies that cannot save us, that cannot themselves give us security for eternity.

O Lord, our God, we pray that you would send forth your light and your truth to the ends of the earth to bring people into an awareness and an acceptance of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 51] We ask your blessing especially at this time for our own nation. We pray again for our leaders. We ask, O Lord, for those in government that you would bless them with enlightened minds.

We pray that you would steer them by the principles of your word not only in regard to this virus but also to everything else that they need to decide on that affects us from day to day.

Bless us, Lord, we pray, exalt us morally and spiritually. Grant that you would turn your face away from our sin for our iniquity is indeed a blot upon the landscape of our nation.

We pray, O Lord, for ourselves that our own lives may also show that purity of purpose, that purity of behaviour in accordance with your word.

We confess to be your people. Help us to show it, Lord, in the world that we may be more and more like yourself. We ask your blessing too for that great nation of the United States who have gone through these difficult months of choosing a president and an administration.

[14 : 01] Bless them, we pray, at this time when there is still much turmoil and uncertainty. We ask that you would bless the incoming president, Joe Biden, committing him to you, asking, O Lord, whatever use they or others may have or ourselves of him or of what he will lead as an administration.

You have called upon us to pray for all who are in authority at all times. We pray too for Donald Trump as he comes to this particular point in his own life and in his presidency.

We commend him to you also, asking, Lord, that you would bless him and that you would bring him further into the knowledge of your word. We pray that in his own background which he speaks about so often in regard to his mother and her upbringing and what she gave him, we pray that he will know of the power of the gospel in his life and to the influencing of many.

Bless that nation, Lord, we pray, and prevent further disruption, violence, and grant to unite, and we pray, under your own truth.

Bless your people amongst them and all who gather from time to time to worship as we do here. Bless the gospel among them and grant that you would deliver many there from the darkness of atheism and darkness of secularism, whatever else prevents them, O Lord, from people from coming to know yourself.

[15 : 34] And so be with us, we pray, and continue to bless our schools and our hospitals and care homes, all who work there and all who are concerned, Lord, to have the virus prevented from further entry into these places.

We ask, O Lord, that you would grant your blessing in that regard. Hear us now and continue with us and cleanse us, we pray, from all our sin. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Okay, children, we're looking at the I Am sayings of Jesus and we've come to John chapter 10. Last time we looked at John chapter 10 where Jesus says, I am the door and tonight we're looking at Jesus saying there, I am the good shepherd.

He's talking here in this chapter about shepherds, some of them not good shepherds who don't really care for the sheep but he says, I am the good shepherd.

Verse 11 where he says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

[16 : 51] He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

Every shepherd loves the flock that he looks after and every shepherd, every good shepherd knows that flock very well. He doesn't just care for the flock generally.

He cares for every single sheep in that flock. When you see shepherds sometimes on television or if you know any shepherds or crafters, very often if you ask them about any of the sheep, they'll know exactly what that sheep is like, what that sheep needs.

They know its behavior, its temperament. They know the flock that they're looking after perfectly and they love the flock. They love every single sheep, even the difficult ones.

They've all got their own characteristics like we as human beings have, but every good shepherd loves the flock and loves to look after the flock. And Jesus is talking here about shepherds which he was very familiar with in his own day and he says here some shepherds were not very good when they saw a wolf coming.

[18 : 03] A wolf would obviously want to destroy the sheep, get in amongst the sheep and kill some of them. Well, he says some of them just fled and left the sheep to the wolves.

But he said, I am the good shepherd. When Jesus came to death, to the death of the cross, he didn't run away even though that was such a terrible death.

Remember the death of Jesus on the cross is more than just death to you and to me. It's death and the Bible describes death as the wages of sin.

What we deserve for our sin, we're going to mention hell tonight in our study of Ecclesiastes and hell, that lost eternity, that place of the lost that goes on forever that we read in Matthew 25, that's what Jesus had to face.

That's what we deserve for our sins and that's what he took to himself and he didn't run away from that. Why didn't he run away from that? Not because he wasn't afraid.

[19 : 14] In Gethsemane, he showed elements of being afraid. He was a real human being and in the face of death there was a certain fear naturally.

but he didn't run away because he loved his sheep. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and he says later on in the passage that his father loves him because I lay down my life for the sheep.

When we think about Jesus as the shepherd, one of the greatest evidences and proofs that he loves his people is that he died for them the death of the cross.

And he still actually looks after his sheep even from heaven. The shepherding of Jesus goes on as we come to know him as our saviour and our friend.

We know that he treats us like a shepherd carefully looks after his flock. He protects us. He feeds us through his word. He has given us his spirit whenever we trust in him.

[20 : 20] God's spirit comes to live within us. Jesus directs us and Jesus leads us by that spirit throughout our lives. And that love goes on and that love will go on into eternity.

Come to the book of Revelation brings us into a description of what things will be like finally after the judgment and in chapter 7 of Revelation it ends by speaking of Jesus as the shepherd who is also the lamb who died for the sheep.

The shepherd he says there in eternity for all eternity forevermore in heaven Jesus will be leading his flock and feeding his flock because it says there that he will lead them to living fountains of water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

That's what heaven really is about. It is Jesus the shepherd looking after his sheep looking after his people for whom he died will that not be a really wonderful experience especially when you know that it's never going to come to an end that nothing is going to interrupt it it's just going to go on Jesus feeding his flock looking after his flock caring for his flock forevermore.

Jesus is the good shepherd and I hope that you know yourselves Jesus as the shepherd of your life the one who's looking after you the one who's teaching you the one who's guiding you the one who's protecting you.

[22 : 02] Let's say the Lord's Prayer now 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 for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen. Our second reading is the passage we're looking at tonight and that's from Ecclesiastes we've been going through Ecclesiastes as you know for quite a few weeks now and as we're coming to this chapter 8 tonight we'll read from verses 10 to 17 Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and at verse 10 Then I saw the wicked buried they used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things this also is vanity because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily the heart of the children of man is fully said to do evil though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him but it will not be well with the wicked neither will he prolong his days like a shadow because he does not fear before

God there is a vanity that takes place on earth and 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 I said that this also is vanity and I commend joy for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat to drink and to be joyful for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun when I applied my heart to know wisdom to see the business that is done on earth how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep then I saw all the work of God that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun however much a man may toil in seeking he will not find it out even though a wise man claims to know he cannot find it out and then we pray that God will bless to us that portion of his word well let's come back and look at this passage we're looking especially at verses 10 to 13 but there's one or two points from the following verses 2 that we can take into account as we look at this the Bible never sets out to prove the existence of God the Bible begins by telling us about the

God who has always existed but it simply brings us straight into the work of God in creation in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth there is no argument saying here's something by which you can prove that God exists the Bible is God's word it's come forth from him and therefore you'd expect that the Bible would simply acknowledge God's existence as a fact and move on with things from there which is what it is but there are certain things that we're used to in our human experience that we can use towards arguing for the existence of God especially with people who will insist that God does not in fact exist and one of these things one of these concepts a very precious thing is justice we can argue from justice what we understand to be justice dealing with people in accordance with what their behavior requires dealing with people in a way that's righteous or right we can argue from the concept of justice to the existence of the

God the Bible speaks about the God who's revealed himself in the Bible put it this way if there is no ultimate justice if there is no authoritative justice above all human life then the moral universe just falls apart look at verse 14 here there is a vanity that takes place on earth that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous we'll take account of that verse shortly but really you find things there that seem completely contrary to fairness or to correctness people who are righteous and yet what happens in their lives is basically the same as what happens to wicked people if there is no ultimate justice think about someone a despot such as

[27 : 14] Hitler who didn't have justice administered to him in this world who headed up such a horrible grotesque evil regime as the Nazi regime which resulted in the death of millions and millions of people in the second world war throughout the whole world think of the fact that he was never brought to court because he didn't live to see justice in this world if there is no ultimate justice then where does that leave us when you think about such a person such a life such an awful person what are you left with well some people would say well that's just how it is there is no ultimate justice things are as they are we just have to accept that people will say I don't need to believe in God or believe even in justice just the world is as it is you do your best in it you treat people as you would expect them to treat you but let's not talk about ultimates or absolutes or ultimate justice in that respect well that's not how the

Bible sees it and in fact that's really not how any human being that has a grain of common sense sees it because ingrained in your heart and in my heart and in your conscience and my conscience is the need for justice to be done justice is something that every human heart insists on and when you see injustice you immediately respond to say that just isn't right that isn't something that ought to be that has to be corrected and so the Bible you see brings us and Ecclesiastes here brings us to a final judgment a final judgment where justice is the basis of that judgment now it doesn't go into detail you need to go to the next of the New Testament for example where we read which talks about the final order of things which talks about the last judgment and God's justice in a way that you don't find of course as much in detail in

Ecclesiastes but you have the same you have the word of God in its entirety and so we work from this through to the New Testament because we know it's come from God and it's a unity of truth therefore we can say looking at that light of the New Testament that this final judgment this justice that will be done is the means by which God will ultimately correct and put it to its rightful place whether it's good or evil it will have its rightful place in the judgment and by the justice of God and that's as true for the righteous as it is for the wicked it's as true for those who are in Christ as it is for those who are not because justice is really what lies behind the judgment of God of God's people as we read in Matthew 25 he will say to those on the right come inherit the kingdom why are they able to inherit the kingdom because they are righteous they are righteous in Christ they're righteous with the righteousness of Jesus that's the beauty or one of the most wonderful things about when you accept

Christ you'll actually then come to be as it's usually put clothed with his righteousness and God accepts you as if you had never sinned whereas with the wicked they are judged in a just way as well but they're not righteous therefore they have their own place in the final order solemn as that is so how does this passage in Ecclesiastes bring us forward in thinking about those concepts what does it have to say well here the writer is making three observations three observations and then secondly we find him coming to one conclusion he makes three observations first of all something that's unfitting and then secondly something that's unfinished and then thirdly something that's unfair something unfitting look at verse 10 then I saw the wicked buried they used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things this also is vanity meaningless or futility what is he actually saying here well he was a great observer of people we take it the writer was solemn and whoever actually is finally responsible for the book of ecclesiastes under God's direction he was a great observer of people of human beings and how they went about their lives then I saw the wicked buried he took note of the burial of people he knew were wicked the ungodly people who were not at all concerned to honour God of course wicked in the Bible very often is used not just of those who've done gross sin or evil wicked has a whole range of levels in it if you like beginning from what you might say is less a less wicked life than those who've committed murder or whatever else horrors people actually sometimes engage in wicked is really the opposite of righteous so whatever grades you have within wickedness they are all to some extent the opposite of righteousness and righteousness as we've said is what marks the people of God that's what he has actually given us in Jesus

Christ but the wicked he says I saw them buried and wickedness let's remember it's not something that happens suddenly it's a chosen habit of life what he's saying here is it could be that he's actually saying they used to go in and out of the holy place that they were accustomed to going to whether it's the temple or wherever that holy place whatever it means it's probably the temple but anyway it was regarded as a holy place a place of religious holiness and they used to go in and out of the holy place it could mean that when they came to have their burial they were given a believer's burial even though they were wicked even though there were people who were not righteous happens all the time doesn't it happens all the time people who are known not to have been godly sometimes far from it and yet they're spoken about as if they had been exemplary

[33 : 59] Christians they're given a believer's funeral and he is what he's saying I saw the wicked buried they used to go in and out of the holy place it's a very solemn thing if you take it that this is really part of the pattern of their lives that they were familiar with the temple with the things of the temple with religious practices with the worship of god there that they were not strangers to that it's a very very telling thing and a very solemn thing that they're described as the wicked and when they were buried they weren't changed into righteous people they were buried as wicked people in any case they were praised in the city where they had done such things in other words when he says they were praised in the city it means their wickedness was forgotten how often you've seen that happening in life in real life you've seen people who were obviously ungodly obviously careless in their own lives as far as anything to do with god or righteousness who didn't care for other people's lives either and yet their wickedness is forgotten they're held up in society as if they were pillars of the establishment you see it's the same in every generation of human beings things are not as they should be things are not in accord with what is right what is fitting and that's what he's saying

I observed I saw the wicked buried they used to go in and out of the holy place and they were praised in the city where they had done such things he's saying this is something that is unfitting it just doesn't fit together properly the praise that they were given and the lifestyle that they lived and you still see it to this day that's why there's a great responsibility on us who preach the gospel who conduct funerals sometimes we may even have requests for people who are known to be not righteous people at all requests to sing something or whatever or say things about them that would make out that they were actually very noble Christians and we can't do that it's a person's life that tells what's in their heart and that's what he's saying here it's unfitting that the wicked should be given a Christian burial it doesn't mean that we don't bury people through church services and so on that these things are not provided but it does mean that they are not to be praised in the city where they have done such things as if they had been quite different to what they actually were well that's the first point he saw something unfitting secondly he's saying he saw something unfinished he says verse 11 because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil sentence is delayed it's not actually been applied in the way that it ought to have been it's just kept back it's postponed if you like sometimes of course you find in life as it was then and it is now sentences don't fit the crimes and there are very obvious instances of that and you'll find people complaining about the fact that some people have almost been let off with serious crime and the sentence if it's there doesn't really fit with what actually they have done and been felt guilty of in any case what he's concerned with here is how any misappropriation or delay in sentencing in actually dealing with something that's been done that's wrong and not dealt with properly he says the heart of the children of man is fully said to do evil what happens when you don't actually have a proper administration of justice when you have inequity in the field of justice well it encourages more sin that's what he's saying the heart of the children of man is fully said to do evil you find people that aren't actually punished according to their crime others take encouragement from that and they'll say well it's worthwhile if that's all that's going to happen then fine let's just keep doing what we're doing that's what he's saying there's a second vanity he saw something unfinished and you see he's taking us to the heart of the matter he's speaking about the heart of the children of men that's where the problem lies and the heart of sinners like you and I naturally is encouraged by seeing things like an unfinished or inequity in regards to dealing with people and what's deserved as far as their behaviour is concerned so he's saying

I saw something unfitting I then saw something unfinished something delayed something postponed and that encouraged more sin and then he's saying I saw something unfair go again to verse 14 there is a vanity that takes place 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 and he's saying there seems to be a discrepancy there amongst human beings and the way human beings are with each other and you know this is actually similar I think to Psalm 73 cast your mind back to Psalm 73 and you know how the psalmist there talks about the dilemma that he had himself he said I was looking I nearly slipped away I nearly stumbled he's talking about something that really shook his faith something that really shook him up spiritually what was it he said I was envious of the arrogance and I when I saw the prosperity of the wicked they have no pangs until death their bodies are fat and sleek they are not in trouble as others are they are not stricken like the rest of mankind pride is their necklace they scoff and speak with malice they set their mouths against the heavens and they say how can God know and is their knowledge in the most high behold these are the wicked always at ease they increase in riches all in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence what he's really saying is these people are getting off with it they have such an easy life they're able to build up all this wealth they're able to use that wealth to further themselves in their life of sin and he says here am

I I'm trying to keep the way that God has set out for me I'm trying to keep myself obedient to God all all all all day long he said I've been stricken rebuked every morning in vain I've kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence and he says when I thought how to understand this it seemed to me a wearisome task does that not sound like ecclesiastus then he says until I went into the sanctuary of God then I discerned their end truly you set them in slippery places you make them fall to ruin how they are destroyed in a moment swept away utterly by terrors and so on see that was the problem he had not set what he was observing in the light of eternity he had simply looked at this present life and was confining his thoughts and his observations and his conclusions to this life and he was shaken up in his faith when he realised just how prosperous and just how much they were able to move on those that he called the wicked contrary to himself that's where ecclesiastus is taking us to because what he's saying to us here is you have to go beyond the things that are under the sun you have to go beyond the things that you see in this life when they're unfitting when they're unfinished when they're unfair ecclesiastus you see is taking us to final justice he's preparing our minds to deal with the things of eternity he's preparing our minds to think of God's judgement and although

God's judgement will ultimately put everything right as it should be the place of the wicked the place of the just will be made obvious and it will be fitting in that day so these are the three observations he sees something unfitting he sees something unfinished and he sees something unfair and then from that he draws one conclusion now ecclesiastus as we've seen is really putting us in the real world of the present the real world of now this is how things are this is how things are under the sun this is what I'm observing human beings in their lives in their lifestyles in their relationships but ecclesiastus does not leave us in the world of now because as we're seeing now he's beginning to open the door to us to the real world of then of eternity of things after this world or beyond this world things of final justice and judgement this is what he's saying yet he says

[43 : 31] I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him but it will not be well with the wicked that's the one conclusion that he's coming to it will be well with the righteous but it will not be well with the wicked you combine them into one conclusion involving both the righteous and the wicked this is what he's saying let's look at them briefly he's talking firstly it will be well verse 12 for those who fear God because they fear before him but you notice how that verse begins though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God in other words he's saying to us despite the fact that you might be drawn aside as Psalm 73 was the psalmist there or even people that he's thinking about here in terms of how they're not fitting or unfinished or fair in this life doesn't matter he says remember how things will be those who fear God it will be well with them now the fear of God we've come across it already in

Ecclesiastes and we'll come across it again in fact it's a major part of the final chapter the fear of God we've said just briefly is living in awe of God living in reverence for God living in honour to God living in love for God you cannot separate the fear of God and love of God because they're conjoined concepts living in the worship of God all of these things belong to the fear of God God fearer a God fearer is how Christians used to be known it's not such a common term now but it's a wonderful term a God fearer is somebody who lives in awe and reverence and honour and love for God if we don't have Jesus tonight we should be afraid of the judgement of God because to die and come under the judgement of God without having Jesus without having the righteousness of Christ you know what that's going to be we'll speak about it in a minute it's going to mean all that hell is described however briefly it is described in the

Bible but when I accept Jesus when you come to actually accept him then you come to in him have your sin already judged when you come to accept Jesus you come to accept the fact that God has actually paid out the price of sin your sin and is no longer lying on your shoulders or my life it's no longer something that's going to go with you towards the judgement Jesus has done that already the judgement of God has taken place in him and on him and so you adore God you live in awe of God because of that in response to that not in order to gain that or to win that or to deserve that righteousness know your fear of God is a response to the fact that God has already brought you to know him and forgiven your sin and set you right in Jesus Christ John Murray theologian Professor

John Murray the late John Murray put it this way the fear of God and love for God are but different aspects of our response to him in the glory of his majesty and holiness and here is Ecclesiastes saying whatever you see in a sinner's life however people may be encouraged to go on in that life however they may dismiss eternity and dismiss judgment however tempting it may be to actually follow their pattern of life be sure of this he said that though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life however much it may seem to be to his advantage yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God they're the ones who are going to benefit ultimately they're the ones who are going to be the gainers in the end you see he's saying here it will be well because they fear before him there's a sense in which they're conscious already of

God's presence in their lives they're living under that known presence of God and so they live accordingly in love and in fear of God it will be well for them but you see you don't have to leave it till you think about the final judgment to take these words and say it will be well with them that's really what it's saying but it's also true isn't it that it is well with them now it is well with them now because the same God the same Jesus the same righteousness is theirs remember the words of Horatio Spafford wrote the words it is well with my soul and one of the verses says when peace like a river attendeth my way when sorrow like sea billows roll whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul despite all it had gone through in losing some of his beloved family at sea this is what he wrote and he wrote it it seems over that very spot in the

[49 : 25] Atlantic where the ship carrying them had perished it is well it is well with my soul thou hast taught me to say and that's for you and for me tonight such an important thing it will be well with those who fear God it is well with those who fear God but it shall not be well with the wicked that's the second part of this one observation this twofold observation it will not be well with the wicked now verse 12 comes into that as well and even though they may be encouraged as the wicked to live as they're living even though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolong his life yet I know that it will not be well with the wicked however well it goes with them in this life however well they get on in worldly terms however much they may seem to be successful in their pursuit of ungodliness or atheism or whatever it is that's contrary to the life that God commends and offers in the

Bible it will not be well with the wicked let me just read a couple of very solemn passages in this regard first of all in Matthew's gospel Matthew chapter 13 where Jesus explained the parable of the weeds as it's called and when he left the crowds his disciples came explained to us the parable of the weeds of the field he said the one who sows the seed the good seed is the son of man the field is the world the good seed is the children of the kingdom the weeds are the sons of the evil one and the enemy who sowed them is the devil the harvest is the clothes of the age and the reapers of the angels just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire so it will be at the close of the age the son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace in that place there will be weeping gnashing of teeth then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father he who has ears let him hear and of course we read in

Matthew chapter 25 also a very solemn passage where you find it concluding there these will go away those who did not love the Lord with many opportunities to do so but didn't they will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life and of course when you then come to the final book of the Bible the revelation and the likes of chapter 20 then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it from his presence earth and sky fled away no place was found for them and I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and the books were opened then another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done and the sea gave up the dead who were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged each of them according to what they have done then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire this is the second death the lake of fire and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire friends heaven is far far better than we can possibly imagine in this life but so is hell much worse than we can imagine that's why it's so important that we take account of what

God is saying never mind those who have the idea these things are just figments of man's religious imagination that these are just inventions done through the years of how certain human beings saw things and philosophized about life and the possibilities or otherwise of the world to come remember this is God's view of things this is God's word this is God's truth this is coming from him who is truth which would you rather have God's truth telling you how awful it is in a lost eternity or human philosophy saying don't worry about these things they're probably not true anyway and if they are they'll not be as bad as what it seems yes they will it'll be worse but heaven is better than you can imagine better than you can possibly imagine in this world and you know the beauty of the

Bible is that yes it speaks to us about death and it speaks about hell and Ecclesiastes as we've seen takes us into some very very solemn and dark things but the Bible is always in the concern to put the positive life eternal life heaven above the things that are dark and negative because that is why Jesus died Jesus died not to condemn sinners but to save his people to make us righteous even though there will be some who will not be saved and who will be damned and who will end up in hell so tonight let me ask you as I ask myself is it well with your soul will it be well with your soul after you die as you make these three observations with the writer of Ecclesiastes as you see much around you even in your own life that's unfitting something that's unfinished things which ought not to be so as you see life sometimes very unfair by way of human judgment you have to come to this conclusion with the writer it will be well with us who fear god but it will not be well with the wicked which side of that line are you and I on tonight because our eternity depends on how you answer it let's pray let's pray oh lord our god we know that your word brings us some things which are difficult to confront that it tells us about solemn solemn truths and things which we ourselves would naturally shy away from but wish were not true we give thanks lord that you have revealed them to us so that we might aspire towards that which is good and lasting and wholesome and shy away and leave behind us those things which are evil and wicked and sinful we thank thee for the clarity with which you have revealed to us the way of salvation the way by which in choosing it and coming to know you and accepting you as our saviour we thereby turn our back on that life of sin and on that lost eternity that we deserve bless to us your word we pray again tonight hear us and continue with us and pardon our sins wash us freely and fit us for heaven for Jesus sake amen well we're going to conclude now by singing psalm number 11 this is from sing psalms page 13 psalm number 11 verses 4 to 7 and the tune is finart the lord is in his holy place the lord is on his heavenly throne his eyes observe the human race and in his sight each one is known verses 4 to 7 of psalm number 11 and sing psalms the lord is in his holy place the lord is in his holy place the lord is on his heavenly throne his eyes observe the human race and in his sight each one is known

[58 : 14] the lord examines all the just the righteous ones he through sad tests but all those who love wickedness and violence his soul detests upon the wicked he will reign his his fiery cold and self abode a scorching wind will be to them such punishment will be their lot for god the lord is righteous still in righteousness he takes delight and they alone will see his face who are in heart and life are bright 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 once again for joining with us in this service and we trust that god will bless us in the days ahead especially that he may keep you safe and well and conduct you further on in your life spiritually thank you so