

November 7, 2021 The Duty Ecclesiastes 12:9-13

The most familiar, and best known verses of Ecclesiastes are not the ones I read to you minutes ago. The best known portion begins: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." The writer, sometimes called the philosopher, or the teacher, is talking about life such as we are in the midst of living, which is why the phrases about phases of life are so recognizable. "A time to be born, a time to die." We all made it safely through the time to be born. We have lost friends, loved ones, parents. We know it hurts to lose people who contributed to your own life. Of death and dying, that great adventure lies yet to come. The writer, and it well may have been King Solomon, David's son, tells us there is "a time to love, and a time to hate, a time of war, and a time of peace."

Here in Canada we tend to think of ourselves as having lived in blessedly peaceful times. I was born 9 months before the official end of World War II, I was a young child during the Korean War, and have no memories concerning it. What I remember as a teenager, is what we saw on television of the Vietnam War. And as a senior citizen, I was often moved to tears, finding myself on the 401 coming east, as a police escorted group of vehicles bore a soldier killed in Afghanistan, to Toronto, from whence his remains would travel to his or her home town for burial. We have lived in the illusion of peaceful times, but war was always occurring somewhere in some other part of the world.

That is not a very encouraging word is it. In fact it gets worse. In verse 8 of this final chapter of Ecclesiastes, the author writes: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!” And it is if you try to make sense out of life by just looking at the world and the behaviour and wisdom of people. The teacher’s final comment is as you heard me read earlier. “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep HIS commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Solomon concludes, if the book was not written by Solomon, then the Teacher concludes, you will not find the meaning of life if all you study is what is here below. You will see that there are good governments and bad, and the good will do some bad things, and in spite of themselves, the bad will do some good things. You will discover there are places that seem to manage to live fairly peaceably, but they are not perfect. And there will be places where war will rage, and thousands will perish, and at times other nations get sucked into the war, and they too suffer loses. Rich nations will have poor people. And poor nations will have an amazing number of happy people. The study of history teaches us many lessons. It can also leave us confused. Because for the most part, we study when we study history, only what was done here below, by people.

“Fear God, and keep HIS commandments.” That is part of the concluding remarks of the Teacher. “Fear God and

keep HIS commandments.” Why? “For this is the whole duty of man.” And the soundness of that second part is to be seen in this. The KJVersion uses the very same words. The whole duty of man is to fear God keep HIS commandments.” If you want to find meaning as you look back over the years through which you have lived. You need to remember, you did not walk through them day by day, year by year, decade by decade alone. I seem to be thinking of the late Eugene Burrell a lot these days. I had conducted a Bible study that Eugene had attended. I do not remember how the subject got started but during coffee I said to him, “What is the chief end of man?” And Eugene replied immediately, “To glorify God and enjoy HIM forever.” Big grin on Eugene’s face. Huge. It is the first question in the Shorter Catechism, once used and revered in The Presbyterian Church In Canada. “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” And remember the phrase fear God does not mean be terrified by HIS presence, it means believe HIM, know HIM.

Many a believer in Jesus, served this nation in uniform. You heard the names read out of people who attended this church, who served God and country in World War I and World War II. Being faithful, does not mean, you could not be a member of the Canadian military. As a matter of fact one of the things I read, when I was younger than I am now, (long enough ago that I cannot cite the source). Don’t remember which book it was. That many Christians joined the army of the Roman Empire. If you try to understand life, just looking at and studying the wisdom of mankind, you will come

to the same conclusion Solomon did. Meaningless! If you are looking for meaning and seriously looking for meaning you need to look beyond the affairs and the wisdom of man. Find faith. Fear God and keep, that is live by, HIS commandments.

You see, faith does not resolve all the conflicts in trying to find peace. Faith is one of those secret ingredients that allows us to live through all the things that trouble us. Finding peace in the midst of the questions that confound us. Finding peace in the midst of terrible things. Bad memories. Dreams that haunt us.

Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol. 2 centuries later it is his most loved creation. Just a 100 pages long. Dicken's novels are 6 to 8 times longer. But what is A Christmas Carol about? A wicked, hard, evil man who profited from the misfortunes of others. It is about Scrooge's finding new life in a Christmas when he was quite old. He came to faith. He was born again. He became a man who helped people who needed help. He was the means whereby Tiny Tim did not die. Bob Cratchet's family survived. Fear God and keep His commandments. Enter into a life where miracles occur.

What did Jesus say was the greatest commandment? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." And HE gave a bonus to the one who asked the question. He said, "And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself." And so there could be no confusion he defined neighbour, by telling a story

in which a Samaritan was the hero! A foreigner! And then he said something even more radical, but profoundly true... “All the law, (the commandments of God) and all the prophets, (the books of teaching written by holy men, men like Isaiah), hang on these two commandments.”

Now you may indeed be wondering at this point, what does all this stuff have to do with Remembrance Day. Good question. My father-in-law served in World War II. I had a cousin who was decorated in World War II, considerably older than I. We know many died in that war on both sides. I am talking about meaning being found in the midst of chaos and war and evil. What came out of it all? Wherever freedom is celebrated, and I celebrate freedom as a Canadian citizen, there is the privilege given, to pursue a life that involves faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I find meaning in the details of my life. Why? Because I have attempted to do, what Solomon advised. “Here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep HIS commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Praise God. In the midst of his confusion, and disappointment, in the end, the Teacher got it right.

Let us pray;

Lord on this day and looking forward to the 11th day, and the 11th hour of this month, we give thanks for those who have worn Canada’s uniform, and shaped the world, and the nation in which we have the privilege to be living. We know it is not perfect. But it has permitted us to pray and read the Bible and sing songs of praise as we worship YOU. And YOU have

gotten us through the hardest parts of the road. Lord I thank you for Canadian soldiers and their unselfishness in war, in peace, in chaos, in fire and the pandemic. They have consistently, men and women, put themselves in danger that we might live blessed lives, in peace. We remember them as gifts you gave to us. Amen