

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk*The Wisdom of the Gospel*

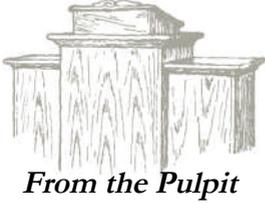
The gospel is the sum of wisdom; a collection of knowledge; a treasure-house of truth; and a disclosure of mysterious secrets. In it we see how justice and mercy may be associated; here we see unalterable law entirely satisfied, and sovereign love carrying away the sinner in triumph. Our meditation on it broadens the mind; and as it opens to our soul in successive flashes of glory, we stand astonished at the profound wisdom manifest in it. Yes, dear friends! if you seek wisdom, you will see it displayed in all its greatness; not in the firmness of the earth's foundations—not in the measured march of the clouds of the sky, nor in the perpetual motions of the waves of the sea; not in the vegetation with all its intricate forms of beauty, nor in the animal with its marvellous tissue of nerve, and vein, and sinew; nor even in man, that last and loftiest work of the Creator. But turn aside and see this great sight!—an incarnate God upon the cross; a substitute atoning for mortal's guilt; a sacrifice satisfying the vengeance of Heaven, and delivering the rebellious sinner. Here is essential wisdom; enthroned, crowned, and glorified. Admire, you men of the earth, if you are not blind; and you who glory in your learning bow your heads in reverence, and admit that all your skill could not have devised a gospel that is one so just to God, so safe to man.

Charles Spurgeon

The Gospel - Different Than Expected

The Sermon on the Mount as it is commonly called seems to have been the Lord's first free utterance in the presence of any large assembly of the good news of the kingdom and this good news, commonly referred to as the Gospel. How different, at the first sound of it, must the good news have been from the news anxiously expected by those who waited for the Messiah! Most if not all of Jesus audience were expecting a King who would lift the Roman yoke of them and restore Israel as a nation but Jesus reminded the people that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways – that the design of God is other and better than the expectation of man. The good news Jesus brought was the truth from heaven that the redemption of man from sin was at hand in the person of Jesus Christ.

George MacDonald-edited



*Number 12 of 12 expository messages from:
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:
Brother Linford Berry
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From the Pulpit

The End of the Matter

God's blessings to each of you, I invite you to the preaching of the word from Ecclesiastes chapter 12.

Here we are at the end of this book, the end of the matter, and some of you are breathing a great sigh of relief, finally, finally we get to the end of Ecclesiastes! Others of you are kind of disappointed because you have enjoyed this journey through Ecclesiastes as have I but all good things must come to an end they say.

You know I find this thing kind of dynamic, you know there are those who see the glass as half full and others see it as half empty, I see the same kind of dynamic is present in life and in ageing, for some people there is great relief that this miserable life is about to conclude - just get me out of here. For other people they experience frustration and disappointment in not being able to continue to enjoy the blessings of life so we try to hang on to those as long as we possibly can.

Now whichever camp you find yourself in the book of Ecclesiastes has something to say to you, whether you see the glass as half full or half empty, the message of Ecclesiastes does speak to you.

So let's just review a little bit this morning what this little book is all about just to get a bird's eye view of where we've been we will just kind of walk this journey quickly together and then we will read our text for today.

The preacher in Ecclesiastes begins by explaining that this is the record of his search for meaning and purpose in life, that's what he is about, how do I find meaning and purpose in life. He says in verse 3 of chapter 1 what does a man gain by all the toil by which he toils under the sun?

In other words what is the point of all of this?

That is the question he seeks to answer and so he says in verse 13 of chapter 1, I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

So basically he is saying I'm going to go looking for this and I'm going to make this an extraordinary search, I'm going to uncover every possibility, I'm going to explore every avenue and I'm going to find what is the meaning and purpose of life.

And as we reviewed King Solomon, whom we believe this book to be about and written by, he did have at his disposal resources that enabled him to do just that and his conclusion was it is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of men to be busy with, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

And from a purely earthly perspective this is so true, that's all there is. And the preacher goes on to demonstrate how this works he demonstrates this by the record of his own pursuits of pleasure, his pursuit of knowledge, his pursuit of wealth, his pursuit of hard work and even his pursuit of wisdom and he demonstrates that none of those things are sufficient to bring him meaning and purpose in life.

At the end of this perceiving he comes to recognise that the only way that we are ever going to find any satisfaction in life is if God is recognised as the one who is the giver of everything, if God is recognised as the one who is in control of everything, everything that we have even the ability to find enjoyment, to find satisfaction, that comes from God too.

It says in chapter 3 verse 25 for apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? The answer is nobody.

So then the preacher begins to set forth in the middle chapters of this book the best way to live in light of this great reality and begins in chapter 3 with the reminder that God has established a time for everything, this is God's timetable and then the preacher goes on to test this reality, he tests wisdom and folly, he relates this reality to everyday life, everyday living in terms of evil and oppression that exists in the world, what do we do with that?

He relates this to the proper worship of God, to the vanity of wealth and honour from an earthly perspective, he relates this to the reality of suffering and how we should respond to it, the way we should relate to earthly

authority, particularly government, and finally toward the end of the book in the last few chapters he talks about the way in which we should live our lives in view of the coming certain judgement of God.

We see in Ecclesiastes that it is okay to ask hard questions, it is okay to question overly simple theological answers, it is okay to question conventional wisdom or naïve piety, our religion, our life needs to be kept honest to be kept in touch with the realities that we experience every day.

The book of Ecclesiastes insists that everyday enjoyment is also important and that neither religious asceticism nor overwork should stop us from simply enjoying our work, enjoying our food, enjoying the people who are close to us. But most importantly the book of Ecclesiastes tells us, and shows us over and over again, that we are not in control, that the result of our labours is not even certain, that our life is one of transition of change that it is often confusing and unpredictable.

Most of us do not leave a legacy that will be remembered for many generations, luxury and wealth are not worth the labour involved, better to accept the ordinary joys that God sees fit to give us, to enjoy the good day, to accept the evil day without finding fault with God, enjoy what is at hand do not long for that which you cannot obtain, enter into life with zest, provide for the future as best you can but leave it up to God to direct your steps and keep your options open because you do not know what will happen tomorrow or the next day or next year so do not be overly cautious but be wise, enjoy life while you can because old age and death are coming and after that the Judgement.

And so we get to the end of this study and the end of this book and this is what we find, it is the summary statement, the answer to all the hard questions, the answers to the question where meaning and purpose is found and quite frankly some of us don't like the answer. For some of us the answer is kind of like a goad, but here is the summary statement: Ecclesiastes 12:13, the end of the matter, all has been heard, so we've explored it all, we went through this whole journey together and this is it; "Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."

That's it! That's all we've got.

I think some of us were secretly hoping that Solomon would at least find a little bit of meaning and a little bit of purpose in the pursuit of pleasure and wealth or at least in the pursuit of hard work but no, in the final analysis the only thing that can truly and eternally be valuable as this; Fear God and keep his commandments.

That is what we were made for, this is why we exist and if we do anything else we will find vanity and futility at every turn.

Let's read Ecclesiastes chapter 12. (ESV)

I'll start at verse 9 of Chapter 11 because it fits with the context here.

[Ecclesiastes 11:9-10](#) Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

[Ecclesiastes 12:1-14](#) Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— ⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, ⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. ⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. ¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. ¹³

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Now let me explain what I intend to do with this passage in the short time that we have left.

First of all we are not going to spend much time on verses 2 through 8, I think it is pretty clear that these verses are a poetic description of the ageing process, of the process of dying and as I said in one of the first sermons from this book you know we start of life sort of helpless as little babies, we eat soft food, we mumble to ourselves, we wear a diaper, we have no teeth and pretty much that is where we are going to end up as well. And there are a few years in between those that pass really, really quickly.

We could spend all morning explaining and surmising what all these poetic references to ageing mean in terms of the decline of the human body and our frailties but in the end it really won't change anything we are still going to die, we are still going to get old, our bodies and our minds are going to decline and it seems that very few people agree what all these things mean anyway so it would be interesting and fascinating and enjoyable to speculate all morning about this stuff but I want us this morning to focus on the beginning and the end of this passage.

There are 2 groups of people that the preacher addresses, and 2 groups of people that I wish to address this morning.

The 1st group are the young people, now who are the young people? We all like to think of ourselves as young people, right, anybody younger than us is young people anybody that is older than us is old people, right, okay.

Well young people, how do we define young people?

Here is how I would like for us to picture it this morning, let's pretend we are in a car driving down the highway, a young person looks out of the windshield and he sees stretched before him off into the horizon a straight road, it is a long straight road, it disappears into nothingness out there somewhere and every now and then the young person peers off into the distance to see what it looks like down that road but all he sees is this nice straight path off into the sunset.

So no worries about that we will turn our attention to whatever we were doing and we will continue to travel along enjoying the sights and sounds and the pleasures and the company that we are with and we don't need to pay too much attention to that out there.

And often you know we don't really care what's down the end of that road, it is more about the journey, it is more about having fun while we go there. That's young people.

The 2nd group of people that the preacher addresses are the older people. Now notice I didn't say old people I said older, that means everybody who is not a young person, and I will let you place yourself in the proper category. Everybody who is our age or younger are youth and everybody here who is our age or older is old but I would suggest to you that all of us are old in some ways and all of us are young in other ways but here is how I would describe older people in this picture of the road and the highway.

Older people are those for whom the road of life has taken some twists and turns, things have not always gone as planned, older people can look back out of the back window and they see where they have been, they have some regrets, they see some places where they took a wrong turn where they wandered around on the side roads for way too long before they actually returned to the main road. They look ahead and instead of a long straight road off into the sunset they see a road, well it doesn't even go very far, at times it is obscured by clouds and fog, at other times they see a large boulder blocking the road, looming trouble.

Some days, some days the fog lifts a bit, some days they can see between the cracks in the boulders and they see that the road ends not too far ahead and this reality increases the intensity with which they focus on the road immediately ahead and sometimes even ignore the people that are in the car with them, their hands tightly gripping the steering wheel, their knuckles white and it is all they can do to keep it between the white lines.

And some of you, some of us find ourselves there.

This book of Ecclesiastes is written to us and it was written to young people as well. Young people if you listen if you pay attention you can save yourselves a lot of that misery, you can save yourself a lot of that meaningless existence, a lot of those regrets but if you continue on oblivious to what is down the road you will end up a miserable, wretched old person.

Now I think being older starts somewhere around 30, at least it did for me, we have to be old enough to look back and see some of our choices and the results of them, all of a sudden the reality of life starts to settle in but whatever point that is for you I want you to hear and heed the message of the book of Ecclesiastes for older people too.

So here it is, the message for young people.

Basically it is this - life is meant to be enjoyed, rejoice oh young man in your youth let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, walk in the ways of your heart, live it up, live with the zest and enthusiasm, God has given you great gifts to be enjoyed so make the most of it but – don't do this without a healthy respect for your Creator, don't do this without a healthy respect for the Day of Judgement that is coming. Remember the Creator in the days of your youth because there is coming a day when you won't remember much of anything at all and if you have spent your whole life consuming the pleasures of life for your own benefit you will come to regret even being alive.

You see if you want real meaning and real purpose in life then fear God keep his commandments.

Now let me remind you, let me reiterate this does not mean you have to live a dour, sad existence, to fear God and keep his commandments is one of the most joyful things you can do it can also be one of the hardest things you can do because the fear God and keeping his commandments means that you don't keep your commandments, you don't satisfy the desires of your flesh, it is God's desires that must reign. But God has given you richly all things to enjoy, God has given us many great gifts and benefits and beautiful things but you can only truly enjoy these things if you recognise them as coming from God and if you use them in the ways that God intends for them to be used.

You see for every good gift that God has given us our flesh, the world and the devil, have devised ways of misusing those gifts for what seems like, for the moment at least, to be more pleasure at least in our short-term view but God has the long view, God sees this whole road from beginning to end, He knows that what is down that long road and what really matters and so do it God's way, respect his rules, keep his commandments. Remember who made you, remember who is looking out for your ultimate

wellbeing and when you are tempted to take the shortcut to meaning and purpose and pleasure in life remember that God is the one who dictates what is good and right and true and beautiful.
Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

Furthermore young people whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not there is coming a day as it says here there is coming a day of which you will say I have no pleasure in them. There is coming a day when the health and ability of youth will give way to the aches and pains of old age, the sharp mental capacity will be dulled, the memory will get fuzzy, even the will to live and work will have subsided and at that point it will be nearly too late to change course if you find yourself on the wrong road. There will be no way to go back and redo or undo, no more fresh starts because there is no more energy, there is no more strength to do anything significantly different.

The choices that you have made will have brought you to where you are and there is nothing that you can do at that point to change it.
So don't live a life now that will leave you with regret later.

Now what about us older people?

Those of us who do live with regrets, those who do find ourselves having taking a detour having wandered off the main highway, those of us who realise we have made a lot of bad decisions, we have wasted a lot of time and resources, maybe we even are starting to feel the effects of old age what is the message for us from this passage?

Can we have any hope, any meaning and purpose in our lives, in what is left of our life?

The answer is yes, a resounding yes.

You see we have some advantages that young people don't, we have a perspective that can only be developed through time and experience – this is called wisdom, wisdom comes through those who have experienced life and learnt lessons from it. That was the preacher.

It says here in verse 9 that the preacher was wise and the preacher taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

Now some people live their lives and they never learn any lessons from their experiences, sometimes they keep on making the same mistakes because they don't redeem the mistakes that they have made but wisdom comes as we learn the lessons from life, as we learn the lessons from the wrong turns that we have taken and then we have this responsibility, this opportunity, to record what we have learned to pass it onto others in a way that is upright and true and careful.

But this is hard, it is hard for us and it is hard for young people.

Let me try and explain it this way.

You see many times we get to the place in life where we realise we have made a lot of bad choices, we've made a lot of wrong decisions and we think, I've totally messed up, what possibly could I offer to someone else, what possibly could I offer to young people?

You have a lot to offer because it least you know you messed up.

They don't know that yet, they still have yet to find out – so teach them, carefully!

You might not be able to go back and redo your life but you can instruct others and show them a better way, you can stand beside there beside the highway with a sign that says “Don't go this way – Go that way!” But don't just be negative about it.

You see the preacher used words of delight to describe this, he sought to find words that would portray the goodness, the rightness, the truth and he carefully taught others.

So older people show young people by your life, by your speech, that life is to be enjoyed but that more than that God is to be feared and his commandments to be followed.

Now this won't always go over so well, verse 11 it says the words of the wise are like goads.

Anybody know what a goad is?

This brings up some really interesting mental pictures for me, I grew up working on my grandad's and uncle's dairy farm, a goad is a prod, a stick with some nails in it that you use to prod cattle okay. Now my grandfather was a very gentle man, my grandfather would have never allowed me to use a goad on his cows, or an electric shock stick either which is the modern equivalent of a goad, all right so we take out the nails and we put a little electricity in there and zip zip that will make them go!

But that is what the words of the wise are like and the preacher is saying that the words of the wise are like an electric shock stick like a cattle prod, like nails firmly fixed are the collective sayings, you whack them with that goad, those nails are not going to give an inch, it hurts, ouch, we jump and we don't like it but the goad spurs us to action, pushes us to do things that we would not do by ourselves.

The reason you need a goad when you have cattle because the cattle don't go where you want them to go you have to goad them a little.

Well I hope this imagery doesn't get you down young people but you need a goad or two or three, right?

Now one thing to keep in mind about all of this these sayings it says these collective sayings are given by one Shepherd, one Shepherd who is guarding, guiding the flock and he has to have the goad, he has to use it but he cares for the sheep, he loves the sheep. If you use the cattle prod out of spite, if you use the goad out of spite and not out of love the results will not be what you are looking for.

God doesn't discipline us that way but nevertheless the discipline is painful, it does hurt, we don't like it, but because He loves us we take that discipline we learn from it.

So young people when the older person comes along, the one with some wisdom, and they use the electric shock stick on you, the goad, don't just automatically rebel against it, don't just automatically reject them or their instruction, learn the lesson they are trying to teach you knowing that for the most part they do love you even though it doesn't seem like what they are telling you is very loving.

Now a little bit of explanation of verse 12. This verse has been used and misused by many young people, myself included, to justify my annoyance with study and reading but don't take it that way.

I think what he is basically saying that humans can make book after book after book but that doesn't change the truth and the wisdom of God, beware, beware of any book that is not consistent with the reality of fearing God and keeping his commandments. He says beware of anything else.

You see if you want to do something you can find a book, you can find an expert, you can find somebody with a Ph.D. that will tell you whatever it is

that you want to hear, that will support whatever you want to do because you see there is not an end to the making of books, men will continue to devise schemes to justify their own plans.

That's our tendency; we look at justification for ourselves rather than submitting to the cattle prod of the word of God and wisdom.

There are plenty of so-called experts out there, there are plenty of so-called wise men, but make sure to follow The Wise Man, Jesus Christ, He is the true Shepherd, He is the one who genuinely cares for you, who cares for your well-being, who cares for your life both now and for eternity, He is the one who died for you, He is the one who will provide the righteousness that you must have when you stand before God and the Judgement.

These other wise men aren't going to do it, all the books in the world are not going to provide that but this Book is what you must look to for wisdom, Jesus Christ the wise man is whom you must trust in.

Now to know the difference between the wisdom of God and man's wisdom does require that you be discerning, it does require that you be studious and study, it is hard work, there is weariness of the flesh, but it is valuable, it is worthwhile.

So younger person don't look down your nose at those who study, and those who provide discernment, it is cool to study, it's a good idea, somebody has to do it, you ought to do it, recognise this is hard and necessary work.

But older person also recognise you won't get it all figured out, you can study and study and study some more and there is always more to know, more to learn, there will be no end to this.

You see there is a certain kind of mental sorrow and distress that deeper thinkers cannot escape and maybe it is mercy that some of you don't think this way but there is this sorrow, this weariness that comes when we realise that the more we study and the more we learn the more we don't know.

Pascal said the larger the circle of the known the faster is the circumference of the unknown that stretches beyond that.

And so I will say like the preacher says, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

But you see even in this search for wisdom and truth we must realise that we cannot begin with man, we cannot begin with ourselves we must find

an all sufficient foundation for our live in God himself, in our Creator and in his word.

And so older person the irony is that we get to a point where we feel like we really don't have anything to offer because the more we have learnt the more we realise we don't know so we shrink back and sit back and say, yeah let the young people do it, they are the ones who have the energy, they are the ones who have the zeal!

No, we need you, we need older people who have travelled this road who have travelled this highway with all its twists and turns, who have navigated around the boulders, who have driven by faith through the fog and the clouds, we need you.

We need these words of wisdom.

And older persons if you want to find meaning and purpose even in the waning years of your life devote yourself to this, to the teaching, to the collecting and that telling of that story of that wisdom but if you sit around all day moping and complaining, trust me there is plenty of things to complain about, it won't change a thing, you certainly will not find meaning and purpose instead you will find a dull existence that does not glorify God at all and doesn't benefit anyone else.

So in conclusion let me ask all of us, young and old alike;

What are you looking for in life, what are you looking for, what are you searching for, what are your aims, what are your goals, your ambitions?

And maybe even more telling, What will be the measure of success or failure, how will you define it? How will you define success in life, failure in life?

You won't find the answers to any of these questions in a satisfactory way unless and until you come to grips with the reality that the fear of God and the keeping of His commandments is really what you were made to do.

You won't find the answers to any of these questions in a satisfactory way until you come to grips with the reality that there is coming a judgement, there is coming a day, a time and place where you will be evaluated on the basis of whether or not you did fear God and kept his commandments.

It says the secret things will be made known, will be revealed, the real you will come out, the real you will be on display.

Yes you can put on a front for now, especially around your parents or your authority figures in your life or even around your children, you can put on a front for now, and we all do it to some degree or other, but in the Day of Judgement we will stand there completely exposed, completely revealed for who we really are and what will that say about you?

Who will you be in that day?

Will it say that you depended on your own wisdom, that you lived for your own sense of pleasure and satisfaction?

Or will it reveal that you depended on God's wisdom, that you depended on God's good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you lived for his glory that you obeyed his commands?

What will that Day of Judgement reveal about you, about me?

Let's pray.

Our Father we thank you for your word to us even though it is hard, even though it hurts because we realise how short we fall of your glory, we realise each of us that we do not perfectly fear you nor keep your commandments. We have taken wrong turns, we have made bad decisions, we have suffered the consequences.

But God we thank you for the good Shepherd Jesus Christ who has come to take away the guilt and the shame of sin to bring us into right fellowship with you and who will stand there at the Judgement Day providing the righteousness that we can in no way provide and attain to.

I pray that you would work in our hearts, that you would spur us on to love, to good works, to keeping your commandments that we would find their meaning and purpose in life and only in you.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

We Can Only Serve One Master At A Time.

The following is an extract used by permission from "The Curate of Galston" by George MacDonald, 1824-1905, edited by Michael Phillips, published by Bethany House 1985. It portrays a message given by Thomas Wingfold, the curate, to his congregation.

"You cannot serve God and mammon!" – A few stirred uneasily at the authority in his voice.

"Who said this?"

"Is He not the Lord by whose name you are called, in whose name this church was built, and who will at last judge every one of us? And yet how many of you are trying your hardest to do the very thing your Master tells you is impossible? I appeal to your own conscience. Are you not striving to serve God and mammon?"

"Do you say to yourselves that it cannot be? Surely if a man strove hard to serve both God and mammon, he would soon see that it was impossible. It is not easy to serve God, but it is easy to serve wealth. Surely the incompatibility of the two endeavours must quickly become apparent. But the fact is there is no strife in you. With *ease* you serve mammon every day and hour of your lives. But for God you do not even ask yourselves the question whether or not you are serving him at all.

"Some of you are at this very moment indignant that I call you materialistic. Those of you who are assured that God knows you are his servants know also that I do not mean you. Therefore, those who are indignant at being called the servants of mammon are so because they are indeed such. "Let us consider for a moment the God you do not serve, and then the mammon you do serve. The God you do not serve is the Father of Lights, the source of love, the maker of man and woman, the head of the great family, the Father of fatherhood and motherhood, the life-giver who would die to preserve his children but would rather slay them than they should live as slaves of evil, the God who can neither think, nor do, nor endure anything mean or unfair, the God of poetry and music and every marvel, the God of the mountaintops and the rivers that run from the snows of death to make the earth joyous with life, the God of the valley and the wheat field, the God who has set love between youth and maiden, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, the God whom Christ knew, of whom he declared that to know him was eternal life.

"The mammon you serve is not a mere negation but a positive Death. His temple is a darkness, a black hollow, ever hungry, in the heart of man. His wages are death, but he calls them life, and many believe him. I will tell you some of the marks of his service—a few of the badges of his household—for he has no visible temple. No man bends the knee to him; it is only his soul, his manhood, that the worshiper casts in the dust before him.

"When a man talks of the joys of making money, or boasting of number one, meaning himself, then he is a servant of mammon. If when you make a bargain you think only of yourself and your own gain, you are a servant of mammon. If in the church you would say to the rich man, 'Sit here in a good place,' and to the poor man, 'Stand there,' you are a mammon server. If you favour the company of the popular and those whom men call well-to-do, then you are serving mammon and not God. If your hope of well-being in times to come rests upon your houses or lands or business or savings and not upon the living God, whether you are friendly and kind or a churl whom no one loves, you are equally a server of mammon. If the loss of your goods would take from you the joy of your life, then you serve mammon. If with your words you confess that God is the only good, and yet you live as if He had sent you into the world to make yourself rich before you die; if it will add a pang to the pains of your death to think that you have to leave your fair house, your trees, your horses, your shop, your books all behind you, then you are a server of mammon and far truer to your real master than He will prove to you.

"The moment the breath is out of your body your master has already deserted you. And of all that for which you did rejoice, that which gave you such power over your fellows, there is not left so much as a spike of this-tledown for the wind to blow from your sight. For all you had, there is nothing to show

"Some of you are saying in your hearts, 'Preach to yourself and practice your own preaching!'

"And you say well. And so I mean to do, lest having preached to others I should myself be a castaway. God has put money in my power, through gift of one whom you know, I shall endeavour to be a faithful steward of which God through her has committed to me. Hear me, friends: to none of you am I the less a friend because I tell you truths you would hide from own souls."

Those most uncomfortable dared only turn their eyes in sideway glances. The atmosphere was sharp with tension, but Wingfold went on, voice warm, "Money is not mammon; it is God's invention. It is good and the gift of God. If it were not for money and the need of it, there would not be half the friendships in the world. It is powerful for good when divinely used. Give it plenty of air and it is sweet as the hawthorn. But shut it up, and it rots and breeds worms. Like the earth itself, like the heart and mind of man, it must be broken and turned, not heaped together and neglected.

"Money is an angel of mercy, whose wings are full of balm and dews and refreshings," Wingfold explained. "But when you lay hold of him, pluck his wings, pen him in a yard, and fall down and worship him—then, with the blessed vengeance of God his Master, he deals plague and confusion and terror to stop the idolatry. If I misuse or waste or hoard it, I pray my Master to see to it and punish me. I would undergo the pain of any fire rather than be given over to the disgusting idol! And now I will make an offer to my fellow townspeople in the face of this congregation—that whoever will, at the end of three years, bring me his accounts, to him also will I lay open mine, that he may see whether I have made a friend of mammon.

"Friend, don't be the slave of materialism, of greed, of selfishness. Be wary. Don't hoard the gold when it is in your purse. Instead, in God's name, spend and spend more. Take heed *how* you spend. But take heed that you *do* spend. Be as the sun in heaven; let your money be your rays, your angels of love and life and deliverance. Be a candle of the Lord to spread his light through the world. If up till now you have radiated darkness in any fashion humble yourself then arise and shine.

"But if you are poor, then don't mourn over your purse when it is empty. He who desires more than God wills him to have he also is a servant of mammon, for he trusts in what God has made and not in God himself. He who laments what God has taken from him, he is a servant of mammon. He who cannot pray because of the worldly cares pressing in on him is a servant of mammon.

"Certain men in this town love and trust their horses more than the God who made both them *and* their horses. None the less confidently will they expound on the doctrine of God. But a man who does not surrender his soul to the living God and live in him, his religion is worth the splinter of a straw. A man's views on the things of God can only be trusted to the extent that man is himself walking with God.

"Friends, cast your idol into the furnace. Melt your mammon down, coin him up, make God's money of him, and send him out to do God's work. Make of him cups to carry the gift of God, the water of life, through the world—in lovingkindness to the oppressed, in rest to the weary who have borne the burden and heat of the day, in joy to the heavy-hearted, in laughter to the dull-spirited. Let them all be glad with reason and merry without gloating.

"Ah! what gifts in music, in drama, in the story, in the picture, in books, in flowers and friendly feasting, what true gifts might not the mammon of unrighteousness, changed back into the money of God, give to men and women, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. How would you not spend your money for the Lord if he needed it from your hand! He *does* need it, for he that spends it upon the least of his fellows spends it upon the Lord.

"To hold fast to God with one hand while you open wide the other to your neighbour—that is true religion and undefiled, that is the law and the prophets, that is to live the life Jesus came to teach us about and to demonstrate to us.—Lord, defend us from mammon. Hold your temple against his foul invasion. Purify our money with your air and your sun that it may be our slave, and you, Lord, our master. Amen."



Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

WHAT IS BEING SAID? AND WHO IS SAYING IT?

The question the heading asks may address several considerations. One might hear the sound of someone speaking, as in, "I could hear him talking," but not make out what was being said. Or does one understand what the speaker means by what he says? Often the latter perplexity elicits a puzzled inquiry, "What did he say?"

Is God speaking to the world in our time through the calamities and natural disasters that have happened? The question is being asked, "What is God trying to tell us?" It is notable that many in the general public, as well as in our circles, express that God is saying something. Fewer are sure that they understand what He is saying.

The setting described in Genesis 6 leading up to the flood gives room for one to think that God must have been frustrated and grieved with what had become of mankind. "My spirit shall not always strive with man," He said

(v. 3). And when men's hearts were so full of evil imagination continually that God couldn't get a foothold in their minds to reason with them, "it repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart" (v. 6). It is possible that, with the exception of the "thorns also and thistles" (Genesis 3:18), the physical earth up to that time was a very calm and predictable orb. Natural catastrophes as we know them today may have been unknown. How was God to get through to a world that ignored or had virtually forgotten its Creator?

When a terrible natural, catastrophic disaster strikes in our time, the thought that it was a visitation of God's judgment may present itself. The stupendous loss of life occasioned by a tsunami several years ago in Asia, the massive earthquakes in China, Haiti, and Japan, the powerful hurricanes that have ravaged the coasts of the United States in recent years, and the fearfully destructive tornadoes in the south of the United States are arresting people's attention. Are they manifestations of God's punishment on sin, or is He wanting to "get through to us" concerning the most important things in life and eternity?

Almost without fail, when a natural disaster visits a country, area, or community, those suffering loss speak about God. Those observing the destruction are awed by the mighty force of nature and cannot help but acknowledge a mighty God. Perhaps more people, even some self-proclaimed unbelievers, have been caused to call upon God in these situations than by any other means. It is known that some have fallen on their knees and confessed their sins, begging God for mercy and forgiveness.

There is something in most people, regardless of their philosophy, that confesses an Almighty being when overwhelming disaster strikes. It was noted with interest that even in the materialistic nation of Japan, the earthquake and tsunami brought forth expressions about God the Creator. The first verses of Psalm 19 eloquently praise God's handiwork in the natural creation, emphasizing the beauty and grandeur thereof. "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world," David said (vv. 3-4). Although in another sense, this "speech" and "language" that goes out "through all the earth" has been forcefully convincing in the happenings of recent years. Likewise, the words of the apostle Paul could also be applied, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen ... so that they are without excuse" Romans 1:20.

Yes, God is speaking through natural calamities and "untimely" and tragic deaths. On this, people are in general accord. But what is He saying? Do we understand? Daniel Webster once said, "It's not the things that I don't understand [in the Bible] that trouble me, but the things I cannot misunderstand!" For the Christian in particular, this should be true in the broad sense of God's speaking. If we would focus on the obvious, the clearly seen and perceived, instead of on all the musings and speculations, we would be better fitted for service and eternity. Start right there—with the consideration of eternity and the fact that we have no guarantee of tomorrow. Peter says, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

Not everything that happens is caused by God, but He takes advantage of all things that happen and come to pass to press home upon the Christians that this world is not their home (Romans 8:28). They have a higher calling. They're just passing through, looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" Hebrews 11:10. "Life is real, and life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal." If one has not heard God speaking in the recent events and has not understood these obvious truths, then it must be concluded that he is dull of hearing (Matthew 13:15).

In one sense God has said it all already. He said it all at Bethlehem, and at Calvary. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" Hebrews 1:1-2. Jesus Christ was, and is, the final word. He was the very Word of God, made flesh (John 1:1-14). What more could the Father have said than to send the Word made flesh? In Christ was accomplished that written in Hebrews 12, first referring to Mount Sinai, the giving of the Law, and then to that which superseded the Law: "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" Hebrews 12:26-27

The greatest tragedy of all would be to hear but not do.

"Are we actually at peace with God? This is a peace that passes all human understanding, a peace that makes us at peace with all men, as much as lies within us."

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us ..." Acts 15:28.

It is noteworthy that it is recorded first that "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost" and then, next, "to us." Do we poor mortals sometimes try to change that around and say or think that it seems good to us and surely the Spirit will put His stamp of approval on it?

We know that in order for the church or any organization to function, there must be a certain amount of unity. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" Psalm 133:1. Do we sometimes settle for a "spirit of unity," so called, in some of our situations instead of coming together as one in the "unity of the Spirit?"

Sometimes issues and concerns don't seem to come to a good resolution, for whatever reason. Finally some of the brotherhood submits for the sake of unity. But are we minus that good blessing it talks about in Acts 15:28? The spirit of unity usually tries to smooth things over without really dealing with the issue.

If we realize that we are caught up in the spirit of unity, we should take our eyes off trying to submit ourselves to each other. At that point, we can earnestly pray for the Spirit's direction individually. As we all do that, the Spirit will give direction until we are all in harmony. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Endeavoring suggests that it will take an effort to keep the seal of the Spirit. Earnestly seeking the Spirit's direction may cause a certain troubling of the waters for a time until the Spirit's will is known and heeded. The first part of verse 13 in the above-mentioned chapter also suggests that it won't be instant or automatic. Jesus says in Matthew 10:34, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." This implies a certain dividing of truth from untruth.

Are we a bit afraid to steer away from our intellect and knowledge and lean on the Spirit's direction in our lives? Perhaps we fear we may have difficulty understanding His voice among all the other voices. As we are totally honest with ourselves, speaking the truth in our hearts, as it says in Psalm 15:2, we than lay down our concepts, even though they may be right and good in our judgment. As we get real quiet within, the Spirit will speak in a very soft voice like when God spoke to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:12. It may be so soft that, if we are not careful, it will be easy to think it is just a passing thought. But it will witness to the law written within our hearts. "This

is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them" Hebrews 10:16.

In the new dispensation, every born-again Christian is a prophet or prophetess in one sense. In the old dispensation, only the relatively few prophets and some kings had the Holy Spirit within them. But now He is poured out on all who are truly converted and born again. A prophet is someone who by divine inspiration can give direction for the future or has the vision that what is allowed at the present time will lead to problems in the future. We need this anointing today. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" Proverbs 29:18.

How many times do we lean on our intellect because we are a learned and knowledgeable people? We may say or think that this thing, place, or activity does not affect our salvation, because salvation is not in things or works. Instead, it is by faith in Jesus' blood shed on Calvary. That is so true, but where is our carefulness? Our vision, too many times, is for the here and now and not for the future church, namely, our children. Whatever liberty we take, very likely our children will feel justified in the same and maybe a bit more.

When the children of Israel wanted a king, God first told them no, but He finally let them have one because of their insistence. He warned them it would not be well with them and they would have many sorrows. God wanted to be their king, but, being carnal, they wanted something that they could see and didn't require faith and humility. Even though they rejected the Lord as their only king, He did not reject them as His people. God tried to work through their king, but most of the time it was rough going.

What are our "kings" today that crowd out the Spirit's direction? Is it our concepts and intellectual thinking? The Holy Spirit wants to be our one and only guide.

Our affluence can be a great hindrance in dealing with the temporal things. Many things, even luxuries, are available to us at fairly affordable prices so that they seem somewhat reasonable. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" Proverbs 14:12. In these last days, we desperately need the Spirit's direction to make it through all the clutter, time-wasters, and reading material that slyly promote spirits and attitudes that are not godly.

In Genesis 12, God told Abraham to offer Isaac, the son of promise, as a burnt offering to Him. Common sense and reasoning would say that was an unreasonable command and was contradictory to God's will and promise. However, there was a blessing pronounced upon Abraham for his faith and obedience. God is asking us to offer our knowledge, concepts, traditions, good name or reputation, and convictions, even as right as they are, to Him. He then can give back to us what He sees fit, under the unction and leading of the Spirit.

May we not sell ourselves short but submit ourselves to the Spirit, first of all for His will for us individually. May we also have the grace and humility to lay down our light when necessary and submit to one another as the Spirit leads us to do so.

Satan's tactics should be recognized for what they are—trying to rock us to sleep. Discerning between a false liberty, which is of the flesh, and the true liberty, which is in Christ, sets us free from the world.

The unity of the Spirit is only a small foretaste of our eternal home in heaven where there will be unity in perfection and harmony forever.

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*The Word of God dwells in our hearts,
When it rules in the soul,
When it directs our thoughts,
Affections and conversations,
So that we dare not do anything contrary thereunto.*

Richard Sibbes

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