

Friday, March 1, 2019

Conclusion

Ecclesiastes 12 - Song of Songs 1

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body. 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. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:12b-14

There is a conclusion to all that has been written in the book of Ecclesiastes. It has been hinted at all throughout the book. Man exists for God's purposes. There are many books written every day. When it comes to those written to help the Christian, many times they serve the opposite effect. When books that are written about the Bible cause the Bible to be focused on me and my needs, I am drawn away from the real purpose of Scripture. The Bible is given so that those who have been created in His image can know Him and His purposes. It is in discovering Him as the center of all things that I find my purpose and am able to live out my life in joy. When I discover Him as the center of all things, I can truly fear Him. When I discover the depth of His holiness, I am drawn to have holiness be the defining characteristic of my life. This is wisdom. The pursuit of anything less is foolishness. It is foolish to think that God is a cosmic genie of some sort waiting to meet my every whim and need. It is a waste to think that God is simply there to help me feel better when things go bad in this fallen world. It is wise to remember that God has an eternal plan that He is working out and that I have been created by Him to be a part of His plan.

Dear God, remind me often that You are working out an eternal plan. Thank You for choosing me to be a part of that plan. Use my life in whatever way You choose so that Your truth may go forth in a world that is so quickly moving away from Your loving embrace. Amen.

Saturday, March 2, 2019

Love

Song of Songs 1

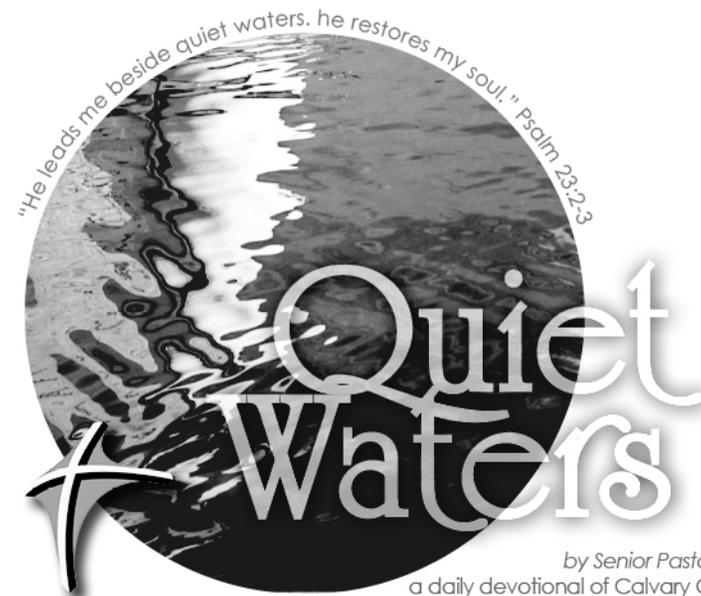
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the maidens love you! Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me to his chambers.

Song of Songs 1:2-4

Solomon's Song of Songs. In other words, of all the songs that Solomon wrote (1,005 according to 1 Kings 4:32) this is the greatest! The theme of the book is love—the greatest virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is intriguing in some ways to find this song in the Bible. It is a song about the excitement and enjoyment of God's gifts of sex, love, and marriage. Jewish rabbis saw the Song of Songs as a book that extolled human love and the proper use of sex in marriage. They also saw an illustration of God's love for His people—the nation of Israel and within that a desire to share a deeper love with them. In the same way, Christian interpreters see the illustration of Christ's love for the Church with Christ as the bridegroom. While it is beautiful to see that illustration, I must be careful not to read this song as an allegory. It is a song between lovers and it celebrates the gift of love and sex as God has designed it. Sex is to be celebrated and enjoyed when it is embraced as God has designed—in marriage between a man and a woman. Satan has turned it into shame and has turned the beauty of it into darkness. The sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's has distorted this beauty and we have been robbed of the pureness that this amazing song declares. This song allows me to search my heart for the places that the world has perverted my perception.

Dear God, love and sex as you have designed it and as it is celebrated in this song are not the norm in the world around me. I have been tainted by what I have seen and heard. Forgive me and help me as I read this song to once again be reminded of the beauty of this gift. Amen.

February 25 - March 2, 2019



Monday, February 25, 2019

Listen

Ecclesiastes 4-5

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.
Ecclesiastes 5:1-2a

After speaking about worshiping money, the writer turns to the worship of God. There is a difference between the worship of the wise and the worship of the fool. The fool does not even realize that his or her worship is wrong. Literally, this phrase means that they sin without thought. True worshipers of God worship in spirit and in truth. This is not easy for me because my self is constantly telling me to worship me. That is what fools do. Without any thought, they open their mouths and make empty vows and declarations that they think will sound right and good. The wise come to worship God with great care and attention, knowing they are coming before the Holy Almighty One. There are ways this relates to church attendance. For many years, as I played the fool, I came for selfish reasons. I needed to feel good about myself, I needed to get it checked off my list, I needed to look good for others. I sang the songs and made the vows within, but I was a fool, sinning without thought. It looked as though I was worshiping God—but there was not really a connection. How much greater is it for me to come carefully and thoughtfully into worshiping my God? As I come to worship, I need to spend time preparing myself to remember that it is all about Him. Then I find myself folded into His purpose and plan—joy.

Dear God, forgive me for the times I have played the fool. I love to come into Your presence and worship You and You alone. Let my words be few as I carefully consider the things I say to You. Amen.

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

Consider

Ecclesiastes 6-7

Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.
Ecclesiastics 7:13-14

Consider the truth of God's control. Apart from God's ultimate and supreme rule over all there is, life is meaningless. The love and pursuit of money will not satisfy. Rather, it will lay waste to a life. The search for significance, satisfaction, and security is deep within each person. It is this need that draws one to the Creator, but, in the fallen world, it is also this need that draws one to fulfill the need on their own. The thirst for this security, satisfaction, and significance draws people into materialism. Accumulating and holding on to wealth and possessions allows the illusion of control. If I have enough, I will be secure, I will have significance, and I will be satisfied. And yet, the opposite happens and I do not own my possessions; rather, they own me. I find, soon enough, that all that I have collected will not ensure the future I have designed for my life. So I need to consider all that God has done. How many times do I think I need to straighten out what God has made crooked. Do I really think God has made things crooked and that I, the created, am somehow able to "fix" it for Him? Arrogance in the extreme. Yet I see it every day in the world around me and in my own heart. I must consider that God has this all under control. All that *is* and *has been* and *will be* is fulfilling His purpose. He holds the future—it is secure.

O, dear LORD, how many times have I doubted that You have this under control? How many times have I thought I needed to straighten something out for You. It really is rather comical when I think about the foolish arrogance it displays. Forgive me. Help me consider Your works. Amen.

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Predictions

Ecclesiastes 8-9

I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come:
Ecclesiastes 9:11-12a

There are so many different ways that the future is predicted. Daily weather forecasts are just one small example. I have read many different predictions in my life. One of my favorite magazine articles was found in *Mechanix Illustrated*, November 1968, entitled *40 Years in the Future*, by James R. Berry. In the article, Berry makes many predictions about what the world will look like in 2008. There are some that he had right but many were not. He suggested that the average work day would be four hours with about two hours of home study to keep up with the technology advances! I don't know many people who work four hours a day. As a people, we believe in cause and effect. As such, given the right amount of information, we believe we can predict the outcome of a certain event. And so, people bet on the races, but all too often, the surefire winner is not the one that crosses the line first. The writer of Ecclesiastes discloses the folly of predictions in these verses. Cause and effect do not take chance into consideration. The turtle just might win the race. Once again, I see the folly in trying to state with certainty that which only God can know. I also see the folly in expecting God to observe my equation.

O LORD, You alone know the outcome of every situation. I can rest in the fact that You hold the future—every moment of it. I have learned to appreciate the unexpected outcomes in life and see them as Your way of showing Your sovereignty. Keep my perspective pure. Amen.

Thursday, February 28, 2019

Inclination

Ecclesiastes 10-11

The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.
Ecclesiastes 10:2-3

Again we see the difference between one who is wise and one who is foolish. The difference is the inclination of the heart. The interesting thing in these verses is the statement of just how obvious the difference is. One cannot hide the inclination of the heart, even as he or she is merely walking down the street. It is obvious whether a person is wise (righteous) or a fool (wicked). Our world tends to like the shades of gray. The world tells us that we are able to walk the middle of the road, choosing neither good nor evil. These verses teach that it is not possible. One will incline one way or the other because of the core of who they are. Careful examination reveals the stupidity of the foolish person. The fool inclines his or her heart to themselves, away from God. The fool loves to look at the things that please a wicked and self-serving heart. The problem in our world is that, while it is obvious that this is stupid, the media has portrayed it as wise and beautiful and entertaining. If I am not careful, I can allow the input of the world to convince me that foolishness is right and wisdom is stupid. I can be convinced that serving the King is something to hide while serving the pretender prince is something to be bold about.

O LORD, how many times have I been swept into believing the lies of the pretender prince who tries to convince me that evil is good? Guide the inclination of my heart. May my heart be given over and devoted to You. Keep me wise and make it obvious in my life. Amen.