

4/26/15 "Stand Tall"

An archbishop was once due to lead a service of Confirmation in a certain school. The parish priest had gone to great lengths to teach the children the various prayers. One of these was: "And with Thy Spirit," in reply to "The Lord be with you."

Then came the great day and the service commenced. Everything went smoothly till the moment the archbishop was due to say: "The Lord be with you." At that moment the microphone began to give trouble. The archbishop declared in an aside, loud enough to be heard throughout the congregation:

"There is something wrong with this blessed mic."

"And with thy spirit," chanted the children, in response.

Paul Basehore, pastor at The Rock Church in Tifton, Georgia, has an excellent article that I will be leaning upon for today's sermon. He writes, Ecclesiastes is a fun book. Whenever I read it I can't help but think of a little old man sitting in his rocking chair, lecturing his grandkids on the front porch of his home! Just listen to verse 2 -- "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." I can just hear him add, "Now get off my lawn!"

Most people agree that the teacher mentioned in this book is actually King Solomon. Solomon was born out of sin -- his father was King David, and his mother was Bathsheba, the woman with whom David had an affair. Despite this, God blessed Solomon and made him King after David died. One night, after offering 1000 sacrifices, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him he could have anything he wanted.

Now, if God Himself came to you and told you that you could have anything you wanted, what would you wish for? Money? Long life? Would you wish for extra wishes?

I don't know what I would do, but Solomon wished for wisdom and discernment. Because of this, Solomon is still known as the wisest man who ever lived. So if the wisest man who ever lived says that everything is meaningless, we might should listen, right?

It's interesting to note that while Solomon was wise, he still sinned greatly. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. WHAT? WOW! Deuteronomy says that the king shall not "multiply wives". If that sin wasn't bad enough, he allowed their influence to lead him into idolatry. He got to the point where he was more concerned with acquiring more wealth and power than seeking the face of God.

And this is the man who built the first permanent Temple! It's even called "Solomon's Temple"!

When Solomon grew old, though, he began to realize what was really important. He became a kind of philosopher, writing books explaining his views. One of these books is Ecclesiastes.

There are 2 verses of Solomon's writings in Ecclesiastes that are important for today. They come from chapter 11, verses 9-10.

9You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

10So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

This verse is saying that being young is a blessing, it's a joyful time in your life! Have fun! It's saying to follow

the ways of your heart. Well, if your heart seeks God, you will follow God. But don't forget that God sees what you do today -- if your heart seeks the things of this world, then you will also follow the things of this world.

Verse 10 is a little different, though. It says not to worry! That brings us to our Jeremiah reading for the day. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

The book of Jeremiah is the second book of the Prophets in the Old Testament. Jeremiah is written in a very complex and poetic Hebrew. It deals with Israel's unfaithfulness to God, a call to repentance, and it attacks the religious and political establishment that has gone array.

Jeremiah, like our verse in Ecclesiastes tells us not to worry. It reminds us that in everything God is looking out for our best interest and has a future with hope planned for each of us.

Now back to Ecclesiastes. Verse 10 specifically tells us not to worry... about your young age. And so now I am especially speaking to our confirmation class... and anyone else of a young age. Ecclesiastes... wise King Solomon, says don't spend your life worrying that your youth will set you apart. Youth is meaningless! Age is meaningless! Strength is meaningless!

Really? Yep. "Everything is meaningless". Solomon makes it clear in his book that the only thing that really matters is God, your relationship to God, your pursuit of God. Everything else -- age, wealth, popularity -- doesn't matter.

This isn't the only place in the Bible where we're told that youth doesn't matter. 1 Timothy 4:12 also makes this comment when it says, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."

Both of these verses have something in common: they are calling you out! Yes, you personally. Young people!

1 and 2 Timothy are letters written by Paul to Timothy. Timothy was a great deal younger than Paul, and saw Paul as a mentor or teacher in the ways of Christ. In his letters, Paul is encouraging Timothy in his ministry -- Timothy took over the leadership of the church in Ephesus from Paul.

Now the context of these words, the reason the Apostle Paul wrote these lines to Timothy, was that Timothy was being criticized for his leadership. There wasn't anything wrong with Timothy's leadership per se, with the things the young man was doing as a leader. Rather, Timothy was being criticized for being too young to be a leader, - too young to hold that level of responsibility in the church.

In this verse, Paul is telling Timothy not to let his age stop him -- be an example for everyone!

Youth is meaningless -- Don't let your youth be an excuse! Do what the Lord has called you to do now, don't wait. 1 Timothy says to set an example "for the believers" -- not just for people younger than you! BE the example, show them what a heart truly on fire for God looks like.

Set an example in speech! That's more than just not swearing. If someone talks to you, don't just give them one-word answers or grunts. Don't ignore them and continue playing with your phone. Carry on a conversation! Be polite and respectful. If they didn't want to talk to you, they wouldn't have started the conversation. This goes for your friends, your family, even your teachers! If they're getting on to you for something, don't talk back. Be respectful and let them see what makes you different than everyone else.

Set an example in conduct! You know what is right and what is wrong. You know that making fun of that person isn't right, or hitting your sister isn't right. Set the example! Teenagers often get a bad reputation. Prove these people wrong!

Set an example in love! Speak love. Show love. Remember, we love because... God loves us! Make that your daily motto. Show everyone around you the type of love that Jesus showed you. Jesus died for you! He died to show you just how much he loved you. That's some serious love!

Set an example in faith! If people are praying, be bold! Go up and pray with them and pray for them! If a friend is in trouble or is hurting, ask if you can pray for her. Be the example!

Set the example in purity! This, like love, ties everything else in with it. I'm not just talking about sexual purity either -- I'm talking about true purity, the type of purity that is the result of Christ washing away all of your sins! It's difficult to be pure if you're sinning. It's difficult to be pure if you're not being polite and respectful to others. It's difficult to be pure if you're doing things you know are wrong. It's difficult to be pure if you're speaking hate and death instead of love and life to others. It's difficult to be pure if you're not being faithful to what God is telling you at that moment.

To be honest, it's just difficult to be pure. But like anytime there are difficult obstacles in your path -- first you pray, then you do it. That still applies here.

If there is anything I really want to make sure that you take home with your... that you remember from my sermon.... it is this: You are not the future of the church. You are the present! Don't wait until you're adults to make a difference for the Kingdom of God. Do it now! Amen.