

# The Liberating Realism of True Christianity

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn now to God's Word, shall we, and our series in Ecclesiastes, and we are reading from the very end of chapter 6 through to the middle of chapter 7.

So Ecclesiastes, chapter 6, and we'll be reading from verse 10. Ecclesiastes 6 and verse 10. Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

The more words, the more vanity. And what is the advantage to man? For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow.

For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

[ 1 : 11 ] It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools, for as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools.

This also is vanity. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. Say not, why were the former days better than these?

[ 2 : 25 ] For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money.

And the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. Amen. And may God bless his word to us this morning.

Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage Paul read for us in Ecclesiastes at the end of chapter 6 and into chapter 7, which is a section all about the liberating realism of true Christianity. As we've seen, Ecclesiastes the preacher is on a mission to force reality upon us. Reality about life, about the universe, about everything.

And all through the first half of the book, I think we've seen how he surveys all life under the sun, as he calls this world. And he proclaims it all vain.

[ 3 : 43 ] That word hevel, which is hard to translate, literally means bubbles or vapor. It's a word that has various nuances. And we've seen that until now.

He's given it the particular slant of vain in the sense of being transient, of being ephemeral, impermanent. And it's reinforced by the phrase, again, he often uses, striving after the wind.

You'll see it there in chapter 6, verse 9. Actually, for the last time, that verse marks the halfway point of the book. And the whole emphasis in this first half of the book has been that we must come to terms with our mortality.

Life is simply ephemeral. It is passing. And we just can't control that. And the whole material world, and we ourselves, we enter the world, as chapter 5, verse 19 says, naked.

And we will depart exactly the same way. We take nothing with us. And therefore, material things, passing things, can never be the key to joy in this world.

[ 4 : 52 ] We saw last time in chapter 5, verse 19. Whether we've got little or whether we've got much, the power to enjoy these things comes only from above, from God himself.

And the key to life, therefore, is to see that and to seek that gift from God, which can only be found with God above the sun, not in this world.

So the key to life in this world is to have a believing walk all through this brief mortal existence. But of course, there's more to come to terms with, isn't there, than just the brevity of life under the sun. There's also the fact that very often life is baffling for us in this world. Our lives are vain. They're hevel, not just in the sense of being impermanent and ephemeral, but also in the sense that life is impenetrable, enigmatic so often in our existence.

And that is actually the chief focus now as we come to the second half of this book. In so many ways, when we actually confront reality in our lives and in this world, instead of trying to pretend it away, which we so often do, when we do confront reality, we have to admit that ours is often a baffling existence.

[ 6 : 22 ] So much in our world is enigmatic. It's elusive. Frankly, often it's incomprehensible to us. We find ourselves confronted, don't we, with manifest evil, injustice, with things that just do not add up in the world, things we just cannot explain.

And even as Christian believers, that's one of our commonest questions, isn't it? Why? Why? Why is there so much struggle in my life? Why does someone who's so good and so godly, someone whom I love, why do they get incurable cancer so young when some reprobate is lucky enough to get it caught early and get a complete cure? Why?

That's the cry, as we'll see, when we come later on to chapter 9. It's a great evil under the sun, he says, that the same events happen to all, the good and the evil alike, the regular worshiper and the reprobate.

It's a mystery. But it's an agonizing reality. But, says the preacher, the real key to life, the way of real wisdom, means coming to term not just with life's impermanence, but also with this incomprehensibility that so often faces us.

The true believing walk, the way of joy and contentment in life, means learning to tread with confident faith through a world that is both brief and also, very often, baffling.

[ 7 : 56 ] So, verses 10 to 12 here of chapter 6 calls us to an acceptance of this reality as a starting point if we're going to find wisdom to help us navigate life day to day in this world.

It's very stark, isn't it? Look at verse 10. Whatever has come to be has already been named. It's known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with someone stronger than he.

To be named means to be given a destiny. And what he's saying is God has named, God has destined man to be mortal. And that's that. Notice in these three verses that word man, Adam, human.

It's repeated four times again in verse 11. What advantage to man? Who knows what is good for man? Verse 12. Who can tell man what will be after him? You see, that very word reminds us that we are dust.

Genesis 1 tells us God made Adam out of the dust, out of the Adama. Humans are made from humus. And that's what we are.

[ 9 : 05 ] So, we've got to accept it and not dispute it. How can you dispute that fact with someone far greater than you, your creator? Can the clay dispute with the potter?

Remember Isaiah says the same way? Don't be ridiculous. No. None of our process stations can change that reality. Verse 11. The more words we speak, the more vanity.

Can't change it. We're always disputing. We're always wanting answers and explanations for everything. We're always asking. Why? Why did that tragedy happen? Why did God let it happen? But we need to remember what we saw back in chapter 5, verse 2, don't we? Not to be rash with our mouths. For God is in heaven.

Don't dispute with one far greater than we. Remember he said, let your words be few. We need to accept the reality of our mortal limitations.

[ 10 : 08 ] And we need to accept that there will be many anomalies, many mysteries in life that we can't comprehend. And we need to learn to live with that tension.

The tension that life's bafflement and that life's brevity inevitably brings to us. And that is the only road, says the preacher, to real wisdom.

Real Christian realism. But is that it? Is there any hope? Is there any help for us in these days of our vain life on earth that so baffle us that just pass like a shadow?

Verse 12. Look. Who knows? What is good for man while he lives this few days of his vain life? Who can tell him what will be after him?

Is there anything? Well, he's told us many times through the book so far, hasn't he? Who can tell us? God alone. We need to pipe down ourselves and we need to listen to him.

[ 11 : 12 ] God is in heaven. We are on earth. Don't forget that. So we need to stop our words and we need to listen to his. And remember the epilogue we'll get to eventually in chapter 12, the end of the book.

It tells us that the preacher here, Ecclesiastes, speaks the very words of God to us. He speaks words of delight, words of truth, wise words, carefully arranged, he says, to act like goads, to prod us and make us think.

But they are firm nails, he says, on which to fix our life. And here now in chapter 7 we have some of these firm words to fix our life on.

What is good for man to live by all his mortal life? Well, says a preacher, listen to the wisdom that comes from someone far greater than you.

Don't dispute it. Accept it and learn from it. And this wisdom, in the end, look down to verse 12 of chapter 7, the last verse of our section.

[ 12 : 17 ] This wisdom will preserve the life of him who has it. So we've got to listen carefully to this wisdom. And as always, in Ecclesiastes, it's about coming to terms with reality.

It's about escaping from all the fantasy and the delusion about life. By stopping disputing with one far greater than we, with the God who speaks to earth from heaven.

So let's listen to him. Look at verses 1 to 6 first. Well, the preacher tells us plainly that wisdom embraces the reality of a fallen world.

It's real and it's realistic about death. And because it embraces our mortality as the supreme reality of life, real wisdom sees the preciousness of life and therefore lives seriously.

Not just living in the shallow superficiality of those who are trying to escape reality and who are colluding in this delusion and this fantasy that's all around us.

[ 13 : 25 ] And this could hardly be more relevant, could it, for our society today? Because we've become so engulfed in utter risk aversion, in utter safetyism about everything.

As though every single death must and can, in fact, be prevented. And we're in great danger of becoming totally unhinged as a society in this.

But of course, that is because for a long time, we've been living in total denial about the reality of aging and death. Modern medicine and cosmetics and all the rest of us help us, don't they, to pretend that somehow we can conquer this aging process.

And of course, that's why fortunes are to be made, exploiting that in these industries. Back in the Victorian era, there was almost a morbid fascination with death.

Nobody ever in that era talked about birth or reproduction, certainly not. Whereas today, we spend all our time talking about sex and reproduction. But we constantly hush up the reality, we hide the reality of death, don't we?

[ 14 : 35 ] We bury it in all sorts of euphemisms and illusions. We sanitize death. Death's been removed, hasn't it, to behind the curtains in hospital wards.

And when somebody does die, all the curtains of all the other bays are drawn, aren't they? So the body can be wheeled out. Nobody has to see it. And then all of a sudden, as if by magic, that empty bed just appears on the ward.

You see, we try not to think about death. But when we do have to mention death, well, think about it. We talk elliptically, don't we?

We talk about slipping away. We talk about people passing. If you read the morning Bible notes that are going through Ecclesiastes at the moment, you'll have seen the other day a quote from Arthur Kessler, a Hungarian writer, who speaks about how even undertakers today are joining in that delusion by dressing up and beautifying corpses.

Quote, endeavoring to transform the dead with lipstick and rouge into horizontal members of the perennial cocktail party.

[ 15 : 46 ] Well, you see, look at verse 2. You see, we only want, don't we, the house of feasting. Verse 4, the house of mirth. We want that even for corpses. And Kessler goes on, But that's the way of sheer folly.

It's the antithesis, isn't it, of true wisdom. Because it just flies in the face of reality. It's no accident, you see, that when you live with a profoundly unrealistic view of life, when you pretend death away, you'll find also that you live with a profoundly perverse valuation of life.

You'll have a totally back-to-front morality. That's what verse 1 is contradicting. The kind of view of reality that sees precious ointment, posh perfume, to be extolled above a good name.

That is, the experience of material things, of wealth and luxury, and the pursuit of them is more important than the character that you are becoming. Which, in fact, is the only legacy that you will actually leave, which will actually outlive you.

No amount of perfume, I'm afraid, will be able to make sweet your decomposing corpse. But your character and what you have been will live on in other people's lives.

[17:22] See, we magnify, don't we, the day of birth as all-important. We celebrate birthdays, we celebrate life as merely something to have, something to possess, rather than giving any thought to the actual significance of those lives.

What it's all about, what it's all for. We act so often as though it was all about what we have and what we want to have, not about what we are and what we're actually becoming.

But no, that is sheer escapism. And it's shallow, it's superficial. And that's why, you see, verse 2, he says the house of mourning, the funeral, is better than the house of feasting.

Just because that is the place that forces us to face reality. For this, you see, he says, this is the end of all mankind. Death is the end for all of us.

And a funeral service and the gravesite today is one of the very few places where we're forced to confront that reality. In our sanitized world, in our let's pretend, make-believe world of our 21st century.

[18:35] Surely one of the great ironies of our generation that we escape, that we switch off from life more and more by watching so-called reality TV, which itself is absolutely removed from reality and sheer fantasy.

But you see, staring into the jaws of an open grave, that is a very sobering place, isn't it? That's why at nearly every funeral, I'll say something like this to those who are gathered.

One day, every one of us will also be carried in a coffin like this to a place like this. Because death is the thing that faces us with reality.

And the living, verse 2, must lay it to heart. And if we're going to be wise, verse 4, well, we will lay it to heart.

Verse 4, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. But it's the fool, you see, who hides, who escapes reality in the house of mirth. And friends, I can tell you that it is very often in the house of mourning at a funeral that so often shows up the stark reality and exposes those who have just been living their lives with their heads in the sand of fantasy.

[19:56] And when tragedy strikes them, when a death comes into their circle of friends or family, leaves them utterly shattered. Their whole emotions are completely unhappled.

unhinged. And there's a vast gulf, isn't there, between that and the funeral of believing Christian people, which is marked by dignity, by composure.

Because that comes from the reality and the realism of our mortality. And an acceptance of what it means to be human beings under God.

Of course there's grief. It's real. It's profound. But there's a seriousness and there's a depth that comes from having lived life in the wisdom of God and having embraced reality about a fallen world and the supreme reality of the fallen world we live in, which is our death.

It's funny how people often think that it's Christians who live with fantasy. They say, oh, your faith's just a crutch, isn't it, to help you hide from life's reality.

[21:03] In fact, it's the absolute opposite of that. It's the Christian, at least it's the Christian who truly understands the truth of Scripture. It's the Christian who has taken to heart this reality.

This is a fallen world. It's a corrupted world, a tainted world. And there will be pain. There will be sorrow. There will be perplexity. There will be adversity.

And sickness and death will come to us all. You see, it is those who have lived life seriously who are not shattered when calamity comes, when reality looms so large that you just can't any longer pretend it away and you have to face it.

Like receiving the diagnosis of untreatable cancer. And of course, there's shock, there's pain, there's real trauma as there was for a minister friend of mine just really a matter of weeks ago for him and his family when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given just weeks to live.

In fact, he did die just last week. But you see, there was in him and in his loved ones, there was a peace, there was an acceptance, there was a strength of heart that comes only from true Christian

realism.

[ 22 : 26 ] Of course, not all Christians are like that. In fact, all of our hearts naturally drift away, don't they? Because we want to chase fantasy. That's why a lot of so-called Christianity today is just a form of escapism dressed up in pious Christian language.

Much more taken up with promises of health and healing and wealth and fulfillment. Much more taken up with the house of feasting and mirth than with the house of mourning.

Though that sort of thing is defeatist, that's negative. No, says the preacher, that is where we learn reality. And you see, verse 3, we're to value the sorrows, the vexations.

It's the same word as chapter 5, verse 17 and elsewhere in the book. Vexations, the trials of life and the reality of death. We are to value these things because, do you see, it's by the sadness of faith that the heart is made glad.

What he's saying is that there is a capacity for real joy. There's a power to plumb the riches and the beauty and the wonder of human experience that cannot ever be had by the escapist, by the shallow bon vivant, by the superficial materialist.

[ 23 : 53 ] And that is because that is a capacity that belongs to the heart, that has been forged on the anvil of affliction and amid the fires of mystery and tragedy and sorrow in life in this fallen world.

And we know that's true, don't we? So often, those Christians who have learned the seriousness of life through all sorts of fiery trials, it's so often that those are the people who are most able to live with true gladness of heart, with the greatest detachment, with the greatest contentment and joy in their life because they have learned what life is really all about.

Not just about celebrating all these things you have, the precious perfumes and the luxury of life, but rather the stewardship of what it's all for and the true gladness of heart that's found in that and only found in that.

And that's why we need this stark wake-up call, isn't it? To face that reality. Be serious about life, he's saying, because you are realistic about death.

We find that very hard to take, don't we? Because it rebukes us. It accuses us so often of superficiality in our own lives and that offends us.

[ 25 : 22 ] But, verse 5, far better, he says, to hear and to embrace that kind of wise rebuke than to hide from it and hide from reality in what he calls the song of fools.

Or, verse 6, the laughter of fools. Sometimes it's true, isn't it? Somebody does hear a word that confronts them and shocks them like that about life.

May well be at a funeral service where they hear a true gospel message. But then it's so easy, isn't it, to go right out from that and to take refuge in the easy laughter of fools.

Laughing with your friends, trying to forget all about that seriousness. Well, says the preacher, that is empty escapism. Don't do that. Sounds comforting at first, maybe.

Verse 6, just like the crackling of a fire of thorns under a pot. But a fire of thorns is no use. After a quick flash and a flame, it just fizzles out, doesn't it? There's no substance there to cook on.

[ 26 : 23 ] This also is vanity. It's useless. Now, the way of wisdom is to be real about death and therefore to be serious about our lives.

It embraces the reality of a fallen world. But second, the warnings here in verses 7 to 10 tell us that wisdom embraces the reality also of our fallen hearts.

It's real and realistic about depravity. You see, the wise believer comes to terms not only with the fallenness of our world, therefore, with a realistic attitude to the mysteries, the perplexities that corrupt our world.

Our world is a twisted world. Bad things do happen to good people. Comes to terms with that. But also, the true believer comes to terms with a real corruption and depravity in his own heart.

And he knows that left to himself, that tendency will always lead him to lapse into denial about the truth and to want to seek to go your own way.

[ 27 : 34 ] In other words, the true believer is utterly realistic about sin. Verse 7, look, even the wise believer can fall into madness, folly. And even the good heart, he says, can be corrupted.

Well, we need to know that, don't we, about ourselves. And real wisdom, you see, lies not just in living seriously with realism about the world.

Real wisdom means living carefully with great restraint regarding ourselves. Now, one thing that an honest Christian learns more and more of every single year as they get older is their capacity to sin and to make a mess of things.

He says, that's what I learn when I'm honest with myself and don't hide. There are so many things in life that can floor us, aren't there? And they all play on our innate capacity for self-delusion and escape from reality.

We have a deep desire within us to try and make this world, to try and make this life what it can never actually be, heaven on earth. But that desire is so, so strong.

[ 28 : 46 ] It's so strong in the secular heart. That's what explains all the desire for individual materialism and chasing things. It's what explains all, every single utopian political dream as well.

We can have heaven on earth if we only have this philosophy or policy. But friends, it's also very strong in the Christian's heart, which is what explains so much of the prosperity theology that I mentioned today.

Whether it's the crass, name it and claim it variety about health and wealth teaching or whether it's a much more pervasive, more polished, subtle variety that actually is very, very widespread in today's evangelicalism.

It's because we human beings simply cannot bear to accept reality. We dispute constantly with the one much stronger than us.

And that means that even Christians constantly drift into seeking that joy, seeking that gladness of heart our way. Especially if God's prescription seems to involve sadness of face, vexation of face.

[ 30 : 01 ] That's the way to learn, he says. Oh, I don't want that. Coming to terms with life as it really is in this age, it's very unattractive to us.

And we want all these things now, but we want that joy, we want that satisfaction our way, we want it without the pain and the struggle. You see, if we're naive, if we're unrealistic about the world and about our own hearts, we will easily be led astray, won't we?

And the preacher mentions, four such snares here in verses 7 to 10, which the wise believer will recognize as real dangers so that we will live with real care, with restraint.

First in verse 7, material gain, the oppressive corruption of bribery and easy gain. the urge for money and wealth can make fools of otherwise highly intelligent people, can't it?

Just think of all the scandals that there have been over recent years in public life, public figures, seeking wealth through cash for questions, cash for honors, and all the latest who-ha about MPs lobbying in return for highly paid directorships and so on.

[ 31 : 16 ] Or just a different version of that, compulsive gambler, chasing constantly the big win, instead of just ruining himself, ruining his family.

Why do people fall for these things? Well, it's escapism, isn't it? It's flight from reality, the reality that involves responsibilities and work and honest toil.

But it's a flight into a fantasy, a neverland that we can have now. I can be someone big, I can have recognition and power, I can have all these things that will bring me real joy in life.

And Christians are vulnerable too, all of us. Many scandals like that have ruined Christian people too, Christian leaders. That's why Paul says those who are to be leaders must not be lovers of money because the hazards are just far too great for them and for the church.

So the preacher is saying to us all, be real. About your own heart. Then verse 8, impatience is another very real snare. Notice he says that impatience is really just a manifestation of pride, proud in spirit.

[ 32 : 29 ] And that's because you see underneath that is really impatience with God and with his ways and with his working in our lives because we want it differently.

We want that gain now. And so we escape in a prideful impatience pursuing our way in our time because we know best, better than God.

You see, God is working with a long-term view. It's the end that he's concerned with, not the beginning like verse 1, the character of a name, not just superficial cosmetics.

And Christians need to remember that, don't we? Very easy to gush all sorts of enthusiastic language about wanting to use our gifts for God and all the rest of it.

Well, what interests God is a patient spirit, something that bears long-term spiritual fruit, fruit that will last, as Jesus put it.

[ 33 : 31 ] Not proud, flash-in-the-pan beginnings that all just end up with nothing. Better the end of a thing than its beginning and the patient spirit than the proud.

And then verse 9, anger too is often the evidence of an escapist mentality, of a refusal to accept the reality of life in a fallen world because we easily get angry, don't we?

Invexed with God and we resent God because we're struggling with this perplexity, with adversity in life. And we're angry with God deep down.

What a destructive thing that can be, he says, lodged, nursed in the bosom. Anger can be like that, can't it? Suppurating, festering like an abscess and then pouring out in a time of crisis, causing such damage, destruction to relationships.

and often to ourselves along with them. Anger can consume you, so be careful, says Ecclesiastes. We're all vulnerable to being angry at life, which really means being angry at God.

[ 34 : 49 ] And also, verse 10, he says, we're very vulnerable to nostalgia, to looking to the former days, which are so much better. finding myself becoming more and more of a grumpy old man, saying things like that.

What was like that in my day? Well, we're not to be like that. We're not to escape from the reality of the present day, which is when God has called us to be living and working and witnessing in.

Now, we so often do that, don't we? We become disgruntled and dissatisfied with life as it really is, so we want to escape that reality.

And nostalgia is not wisdom, says the preacher. Actually, it's sin, because it's rebellion against reality, it's rebellion against God.

And we need to take that seriously. Actually, very many of the problems in churches are due to nostalgia, aren't they? People looking back to better days about this or that or the other thing.

[ 35 : 50 ] When things were more to my liking, is really what it means. Although, actually, people were moaning just as much in former days as they are in present days. But we have nostalgia.

We have often nostalgia for a more Christian society or a time when the church had more influence or we think that we maybe had more impact or any of these sorts of things. Forget all that, says the preacher.

Face reality today. That's real wisdom. Stop using nostalgia as an excuse to shirk your responsibility in life now, today. we're called today, aren't we, to make Christ known in the midst of a needy world?

You see by these things here just how easily we are corrupted because we don't embrace the reality of our own depravity, our propensity to turn so easily from wisdom into foolishness and even madness, he says.

And most of us will think, won't we, this morning, that these warnings are for others? That would be a great warning for him. I think that really does apply to him. And I know it certainly applies to her.

The preacher is speaking to us, to all of us, isn't he?

[ 37 : 03 ] True Christian wisdom means embracing the reality of our own fallen nature, the depravity that's deep within, and the demands that we live life with care, with restraint, lest we should go astray.

there's one vital thing, one final thing that we must take hold of to live wise believing lives in this brief world, in this baffling life.

There's something that's so important that if we don't grasp this, then perhaps we will be just utterly despairing at what the preacher's telling us today. And that is this, that true wisdom embraces the reality of our future hope.

It's real, it's realistic about deliverance that is to come. And that, and that above all, is what will liberate us to live now with all the tension and perplexity and the anguish of life, and yet, to allow the vexation, the sadness of faith, to make our hearts truly glad, and not to drive us to despair.

Look at verse 11, wisdom is good with an inheritance. Now that word inheritance in the Old Testament nearly always means, the particular inheritance in the promised land that guaranteed a place in God's kingdom for each family of Israel.

[ 38 : 32 ] And in the New Testament, you see, Paul the apostle tells us that in Christ this is gloriously fulfilled. In him, he says to the Ephesians, we have received an inheritance rich and glorious in his eternal kingdom.

Peter talks about it too, doesn't he? He calls it an inheritance that is imperishable, unfading, kept in heaven for you. And that is the future hope, the true hope of every Christian believer.

It always has been. And you see, when that is our future, then wisdom will never lose sight of that reality, will it? Even as we are supremely realistic about the present reality of sin and corruption and death in this present age.

Now that will be the one thing above all that empowers us to live in the midst of a troubling world, a perplexing world with wonderful peace and with undying hope.

Peace because we have, verse 11, the wonderful advantage, he says, all our days seeing the sun, we have the wonderful advantage of this truly biblical picture of our inheritance.

[ 39 : 42 ] presence. We have a perspective from God on both the present and the future. So we're not shattered when a fallen world throws things into our path.

We're not ruined when our own fallen hearts tempt us to go astray. We don't expect the world to be any other way now, but rather we're looking to a deliverance, to an inheritance that is still to come. And that knowledge protects our life. It gives us peace. And we have real hope. Not just protection here under the sun in this life, but preservation beyond it.

That's the greatest thing of all. Look at verse 12, the advantage, the real lasting gain of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

Now clearly, he does not just mean here preservation of physical life. Otherwise, if you look down to verse 15, you'll see he's contradicting himself because he says that the righteous does often perish physically before the wicked.

[ 40 : 52 ] We'll see later on when we come to chapter 8, verses 12 and 13, that again he puts it very clearly there. The evil, he says, may prolong physical life, but it is those who fear God, he says, for whom it will be well ultimately, not for the wicked.

The wicked will not prolong his days before God. So clearly then this preservation of life means much more than the length of your mortal life on earth.

Now he knows that what matters in the end is the judgment that's to come. That's the message of the very last verse of the book, isn't it? God will bring every deed to judgment. We've seen it already in chapter 3, verse 17, and in chapter 11, it comes again.

God will bring every deed to judgment. That is what he's focusing on. And so true wisdom means living in this world in the light of that and in the joyous hope of that.

Because verse 12, look, true wisdom, real faith preserves the life of him who has it through that judgment, he means. That's why you see for the wise, as you saw in verse 1, the day of death is better because ultimately the day of death is the day of rebirth, it's the day of resurrection.

[ 42 : 09 ] That's the biblical hope right from the beginning. The promise of God to our fathers that God raises the dead. That's what the apostle Paul said he was arrested for and was on trial for.

Why should it be thought incredible by any of you Jewish people, he's saying to them that God raises the dead. It's there all through the Old Testament, right from the very start. It's here, right here in Ecclesiastes, in front of us right now.

It's here in so many places, in the Proverbs, in the Psalms. And of course for us, as believers living after the resurrection of Jesus, the picture is so much clearer.

But Ecclesiastes here is preaching that same gospel of hope to us, the true gospel, of reality about the present, but an even greater, more glorious reality for the future.

Friends, real Christianity do you see is supremely liberating realism. It gives real power to live in this vexed world, to face death with a steady eye, to face depravity with a steady heart, because it also sees the deliverance that is to come.

[ 43 : 24 ] It has a certain hope. Without that hope, being realistic will mean that we either must live a despairing life, if we're going to be honest about the world, or we will just have to live a deluded life, hiding in superficiality, shallow things.

But listen to the apostle Peter. We have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. we have an inheritance, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven.

And so in this we rejoice, he says, though now for a little while we do face grievous trials. Therefore, he says, preparing your minds for action, being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

that is the same liberating message as the preacher here is telling us in Ecclesiastes. That is the liberating realism of true Christianity.

Amen. Let's pray together. Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, God, God, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which thou hast given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 45 : 19 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.