

Remember Your Creator: Living for the Life-Giving Purpose of God

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises which exceed all that we can desire.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, a very warm welcome indeed to all of you this morning. If you are visiting with us, if you're here for the first time, then you're very welcome indeed. Do hang around afterwards. There's refreshments here at the front, outside there. Plenty of time and opportunity to meet and greet one another and to carry on after the formal part of our service is over.

You're very welcome indeed. There are notices which will be on the screens again at the end of the service as they were at the beginning. Have a look at those. Two things just to flag up for you. Our new on-board course is starting this evening after the five o'clock meeting at Kelvin Grove. That's for people who've been coming for a little while, who want to know more about the life of the church, want to know what it would mean to be a member in partnership with us as part of the congregation here.

[1 : 14] It runs over a few Sunday evenings, gives us an opportunity to explain who we are, what we believe, what we do, what we're all about. So if that would be helpful to you, you're very welcome to come along.

Just pitch up this evening and come along after the service and we'd be glad to help you be part of that. Then also just to remind you that on Wednesday, it is our fortnightly congregational prayer meeting.

That's here in this room, 7.30 on Wednesday. Do come along and join us as we pray together as a church for the work, not just of our church, but our many partners in ministry right around the world. We get news updates from them, details about things going on in their lives, things going on here and particular news to pray for. So a very important time and a great time of fellowship and prayer together.

7.30 on Wednesday. Well, we are turning to the book of Ecclesiastes for the very last time in this current series. And we've reached chapter 12, the last chapter of the book.

[2 : 16] And so we're going to read together in our Bibles now. In Ecclesiastes chapter 12. The last two chapters really gather up the whole message of the book.

We saw last time in chapter 11 just how positive, how joyful and encouraging it is, how venturesome God wants our lives to be, rejoicing in our youth and letting our heart cheer us. But at the same time, remembering that we live in time for eternity. And that is a theme particularly here in chapter 12.

Chapter 12 then, verse 1. 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, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders cease because they're few.

And those who look through the windows are dimmed and the doors on the street are shut. And 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.

[3 : 49] They're afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way. The almond tree only blossoms. The grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets.

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 system and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Vanity, vanity, says the preacher. All is vanity or fleeting, fleeting. All is fleeting. Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

The preacher sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings.

They're given by one shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books, there is no end and much study is weariness of the flesh.

[5 : 33] The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man or this is the whole of man.

This is what it really means to be a human being. For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well do turn with me if you would to Ecclesiastes chapter 12 where the command is remember your creator.

As I said this morning we're coming to our final study in this remarkable book and it is a book of many puzzles perhaps unfamiliar I think to many people because of that.

But I hope we've seen just how relevant its message is, how full it is of many lessons for all of us today.

[6 : 45] Think back to the early chapters that pressed home so powerfully the essential futility of life when we consider it only as part of this world that's vain.

That repeating word vain, hevel, futile, bubbles or vapor it means. Ephemeral, fleeting. What can man gain by his toil under the sun in that kind of a world?

And the answer comes back repeatedly, well nothing. There can be no gain can there in a passing world. Nothing that will last. And yet amid the futility of the endless cycles of nature where there is nothing new under the sun but there's no ultimate progress.

Well there are hints, aren't there, repeatedly of something that is above, something beyond. We sense it inside because as the preacher tells us, God has put eternity into our hearts.

And there's a time, as he says in chapter 3, for every matter including a time for judgment when God will judge the righteous and the wicked. And that fact alone does give us a shaft, doesn't it?

[7 : 58] A shaft of light and perspective on life. And then the following chapters relentlessly explore and expose the harsh realities of life as it really is in this world.

A world that is governed by vanity, by enigma, by bafflement, by vexation. And a world where wisdom is much better than folly and yet, in the end, both the wise and the foolish go to the grave just the same.

And a world where often it seems the wicked, the evil, actually do the best out of life. But again, in the midst of that, there's an ultimate purpose that does keep breaking through.

Because God, we're told, is sovereign. Everything is in his sure hands. And therefore, real wisdom is to be found in heeding his words of wisdom and of truth.

Remember chapter 9, verse 16, wisdom is better than might, even if it's ignored and rejected, as it so often is, amid the shouting of a ruler among fools. So there is a relentless optimism that just keeps coming through from the preacher again and again, despite all the apparent futility of the world around us, with its bondage to decay, with its vexation, with its vanity.

[9 : 21] And so be joyful is the refrain that keeps coming back. I commend joy all the days of your fleeting life here on earth. Believing joy is the path for God's people in this baffling world, says the preacher.

Go, eat your bread, drink your wine with joy. Enjoy life with the wife that you love. That is what God wants us to do. To live with venturesome joy even all the way through this vexed journey of life.

Whatever your hand finds to do, chapter 9, verse 10, do it with all your might. And these little vignettes of glorious relief that keep coming back irrepressibly throughout the book.

Now, as we come to the end of the book, as we said last time in chapter 11 and 12, they come to a climax. The preacher sort of changes up a gear. And now, as he says in chapter 12 here, verse 13, we come to a climax.

We come to the end of the matter. It's all been heard, he says. I'm going to sum it up for you. And it amounts to this. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man.

[10:30] This is the whole of what it means to be truly human, to know life in all its fullness. Life as it's meant to be, as God purposes it to be, even here under the sun.

And that life can be lived joyfully. And we can face that coming death and that judgment with a steady eye.

And to live like that is the only way to live in this world that is hevel, that is passing, is fleeting, is painful. It's the only way to live and not to be overwhelmed by that vexation in life.

And it's the only way to face the eternity that is rooted so deeply within the soul of every human being. But what does all that mean in practice then?

What is the life that fulfills the whole duty, the whole calling and purpose of humanity? Well, that's what these last two chapters encapsulate for us.

[11:28] And I want us to see again just how upbeat, how positive a view of life it really is. We saw last time in chapter 11 that true happiness in life means living in the liberating providence of God and rejoicing in our creator.

But you see, finding the meaning of true happiness means finding the meaning of true humanity. And that's what chapter 12 lays out for us. It's all about living for the life-giving purpose of God. It's about remembering our creator and his call upon our lives and his commands for our lives. We'll only live rejoicing in our creator if we live remembering our creator.

That's the end of the matter is what the preacher says here. Forget your creator and you will forego true humanity and therefore true happiness.

But remember him and you'll find both. That's the message here in chapter 12. Remember your creator. Learn to honor God and learn to listen to God before it's too late.

[12:45] Revere him and therefore respond to him. Live loyally to the one true sovereign by listening to the one true shepherd.

That's the message. Well, let's look at it then in a little bit more detail. First of all, verses 1 to 8, the preacher says, honor God's call. That is, live reverently, recognizing God's call upon your life which is the purpose of all human life.

In other words, live loyally to God, your creator, now before he removes that possibility from you, before the days come when the sun and moon is darkened and the silver cord is snapped.

The sense of joy, the sense of liberation that we see in chapter 11 that comes from knowing that life has real meaning and purpose under God's liberating providence.

That's what comes into sharp focus here. Chapter 12, verse 1, remember your creator in the days of your youth. Above all, it's telling us, the very purpose of mortal life is that we should honor and revere our creator God, the God who made everything, as chapter 11, verse 5 said.

[14:02] Made everything including every single one of us. Now to remember God of course means much more than what we tend to mean by that word.

It means to completely and passionately abandon our whole existence in loyalty to God. To remember God is to make God the highest joy, the greatest joy in our whole life.

The psalmist expresses that meaning very well when he speaks in Psalm 137 about remembering Zion, God's city. Here's what he says, Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

To remember the Lord, to remember our creator is to set him above our highest joy. That's what it means, isn't it? To worship God. To acknowledge God as truly God, as above all other things in life and the world.

To acknowledge ourselves as his creatures. And the truth is, you see, we'll only find the true joy that is God's gift to us in life if we first find our greatest joy in the God who is the giver of every good gift in life.

[15:26] And the way of true and fulsome and liberated joyful humanity on earth is to honor and revere and to give everything to this God, the God of heaven.

And to do so, says the preacher, at the earliest possible time in your life, in the days of your youth. Now that's the very opposite, isn't it, of our world's idea.

The world says, live it up, seek pleasures, sow your wild oats. And then maybe in a long time from now, when you feel a bit of a need for crutch in your old age, well, if you ever do, maybe that's the time to get a bit of religion.

That's the world's view, isn't it? Wrong, says Ecclesiastes. Absolutely wrong. Because for one reason, it gets harder as you get older to remember your creator.

The facts of life bear that out, don't they? Most people who come to real Christian faith do so when they're young. Not everyone, but most. And that's because we get harder. We get hardened the longer that we live without God.

[16:39] The whole point of life, though, is to live life before God and with God. That's why we were created. We were made for fellowship with God. And therefore, to find that fellowship is to find the way and it's to find the only way to real life, to abundant life, to true humanity, to find what human beings are meant for.

God created every nation of mankind, says Paul, giving them life and breath that they should seek God and find him. That's what he says to the Athenian philosophers, remember, in the Areopagus, Acts 17.

That's the purpose of human life. That's the purpose of your life and my life, to find God and know him. And that's why God gives us life.

He gives us days in which he may be found. He cries out to us as the prophet Isaiah put it, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.

Because, you see, from the days of youth, the clock is ticking. Days are passing fast. I know you don't realize that when you're young, when you get a sporting injury and it heals in a week and you're back on the pitch playing rugby again as if nothing happened.

[18:01] Well, just wait. It's not the same when you hit your 50s, I can tell you. A frozen shoulder can take months to get better. A pulled muscle, weeks, months. By the time you're in your 80s, well, just a simple thing like a fall in the house can knock you for months, can't it?

Dose of the flu. Months to recover. So those of you who are young who don't believe me, let me tell you, the preacher says evil days are coming. They're coming.

And these verses, they give us a vivid picture, don't they, of the unmaking of life at the hands of time. The evil days mentioned in verse 1, they march on and light begins to fade on our mortal existence.

These verses are a picture, aren't they, of the reversal of creation. Verse 2, the sun and the light and the moon and the stars darkened and no returning of the sun anymore after the rain, just more dark clouds.

There's real beauty in these verses in the poetry, but it's a haunting beauty. It's chilling because it speaks of the undoing of life and all the complex web of relational beauty and complexity.

[19:18] Some people have sometimes taken these verses allegorically, saying that it refers to the decaying of our bodies. Verse 3, the grinders ceasing, the loosening of our teeth, the dimmed windows while our eyesight beginning to go.

And of course, that happens, doesn't it? All of these things. But I think really the poetry here is better seen as a picture of a whole community in decline and in decay. Everything that's associated with life and relationships is beginning to fade and disappear.

So verse 3, people fade away. The great ones and the doorkeepers alike. The women who are grinding the corn and those who are watching from the windows. Verse 4, their activity fades away. The houses are all shut up. And even the daughters of song, the songbirds, are gone. In verse 5, enjoyment fades away. All that remains is fear and terror.

The almond tree only blossoms, no fruit on it anymore. The crops have all been consumed by these grasshoppers, these locusts. They're so engorged that they can't fly. They're dragging themselves along the ground and there's no food left.

[20:29] And desire fails. Literally, that's saying a caper plant fails, which was used as an appetite arouser but also as an aphrodisiac.

All desire fading away. Everything that animates life draining away. Why? Because life's mortal journey is coming to an end.

In verse 5, you see, another home beckons, man's eternal home. And so, in this earthly home, mourners go about the streets.

Verse 16, it's very poignant, isn't it? The dissolution of life. That's something that was once beautiful, once precious, like a golden lamp ball strung on a silver thread. and the fine porcelain pitcher that was filled by the wheel pump at the water fountain.

It's now broken. It's shattered. The oil of joy is spent. The water of life is all drained away. It's ashes to ashes.

[21 : 39] Verse 7, dust to dust. The dust is the word adamah. So, adam, man, whose few days pass like a shadow, returns to adamah, dust.

The human being returns to the humus that we're made of. It's redolence, isn't it, of another bard's musing on the ages of life.

All the world's a stage. And all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances. And one man in his time plays many parts, his act being seven ages.

At first, the infant mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. And then the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining mourning face creeping like a snail unwillingly to school.

And then the lover sighing like a furnace with a woeful ballad made to his mistress's eyebrow. And then the soldier full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard, jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth.

[22 : 53] And then the justice fair round belly with good cape unlined, with eyes severe and beard of formal cut, full of wise saws in modern instances.

And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloone with spectacles on nose and pouch on side.

His useful hose well saved, a world too wide for his shrunk skank and his big manly voice turning again towards childish treble pipes and whistles in his sound.

Last scene of all that ends this strange event for history is second childishness, a mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Well, the dust does return, doesn't it, to the dust as it was. and the spirit to God who gave it. And so you see verse 8 here ends the main portion of the book just exactly as it began with the motto Hevel, Hevel, everything is Hevel.

[24 : 15] Vanity, best translated here, fleeting, fleeting. Everything is fleeting. Do you remember at the very beginning the opening poem in chapter 1 that follows those words?

It spoke, didn't it, of the circularity of nature's unchanging ways. And the message was be serious about the effects of life. You simply can't get one up on nature.

You can't have lasting gain in a world that is cursed with utility. Well, just so this closing poem. It cries out, be serious about faith in life.

Now. Well, you still can. Why? Because that is what you were created for by God. That's why God put life in your body.

That's why He breathed His Spirit into you so that you would find fellowship with Him before you return to dust. And if you don't, or what Shakespeare said in another place, through Macbeth, well, it's true, isn't it?

[25 : 23] All our yesterdays have lighted fools. The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow. A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

A tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing. life does have God gave us body and spirit so that we would remember our Creator, recognize and honor His call upon our lives and cleave to Him loyally in true faith and trust now, as soon as we can, before the silver cord is snapped, before the golden bowl breaks.

There's urgency, isn't there? Because it's true, we cannot deny that truth. Fleeting, fleeting, everything is fleeting. I wonder if you know this poem I've quoted before.

It's inscribed on a clock in Chester Cathedral. It's called Time's Paces. When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept. When as a youth I waxed more bold, time strolled.

When I became a full-grown man, time ran. When older still I daily grew, time flew. Soon I shall find in passing on time gone.

[26 : 59] O Christ, wilt thou have saved me then? That's the preacher's message here, isn't it? In the last of his own words to us, ending here.

Will we have found our creator before we turn to dust? But finally, you see, the narrator who compiled the preacher's teaching gives us his urgent plea to heed the preacher's words.

Because that is the way to remember your creator. You'll only honor God's call if you do what verses 9 to 14 enjoin on us, and that is to listen to God's commands.

living responsibly and recognizing God's sovereign command over our life, which is his whole pattern for human life. In other words, live listening to God, your shepherd, now, and responding faithfully in obedience now, because God has given us all the direction that we need to find true significance, to find true meaning in life, now, under the sun, and forever, beyond that judgment that's to come.

See, God, our creator, is not absent. He's not silent in this world of confusion and perplexity. He's calling out to us despite our crookedness, despite our folly, despite the evil madness that he says is in the human heart all the time.

[28 : 27] God calls out to us, doesn't he, doesn't he, in our very nature, in the twin megaphons of pain and of pleasure, both of which resonate within us with a deep sense of the eternal in our hearts, that there must be more to life than just this.

There must surely be a judgment, a reversal of all the pain and the perplexity and the evil. And there must somehow surely be a full flourishing of all the beauty and the pleasure that we instinctively sense.

Even in this world, that it's just a shadow of what it could be, what it surely must be somehow, somewhere. Those inconsolable longings that C.S.

Lewis called them, they're a powerful witness, aren't they, to the eternity that is in our hearts. But you see, it's not just in these ways that God calls out to us, in much, much more ways.

He speaks to us in words, in words of absolute clarity and of truth. through the preacher here, who uses care and exquisite wisdom, just as he does in every other part of scripture, through every other preacher and prophet.

[29 : 39] And these verses actually are a great summary, aren't they, of what characterizes the true message of God's word, and what characterizes true messengers of God's word. Look at verses 9 and 10.

They describe the preacher reasoning. Reasoning with a message that is winsomely serious. besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge.

He worked, he labored hard, weighing and studying and arranging with great care. Why? Because his task is so vital for life. He sought words of delight, do you see.

He's utterly serious, but winsome. He's trying to woo people and win people. He's not wanting to drive them away needlessly. Like Moses, the archetypal prophet, the man of God.

He urges people to choose life. Choose life. But notice that these words of delight are not just man-pleasing words. Uprightly it says he wrote words of truth.

[30 : 42] Because the man of God must speak true truth. God's truth. The message can't be a malleable one to try and make it more winsome to some people. God's truth is always a double-edged sword, isn't it?

It can't not be divisive. It cannot but bring great discomfort to some, even as it brings great comfort to others. The aroma of Christ is what the message and the messengers are, says the apostle Paul. And to some, it is a fragrance of life unto life, but to others, at the same time, it is therefore the fragrance of death unto death. God's truth is not that.

That's true, isn't it, when people first encounter the word of God. And it goes on being so. That's what Jesus says so plainly in the parable of the sower.

And that's what we will witness. That's what we do witness in Christian life and in church life. There are people who find the Bible's teaching delightful, sometimes for a very long time.

[31 : 49] But there comes a time when that fragrance turns sour. Because words of truth have touched a part of their life where they're thinking that is deeply challenging and is unwanted and is uncomfortable.

And so it's resisted. That's very hard to see, isn't it? And so it's very tempting to want to tone down the teaching. Just to want the winsome bits, the wooing bits.

But not the warning words. Very tempting. Oh, to just keep the simple things, the simple gospel. Keep out of all of that. But no, says Jesus.

No, says the apostles. And no, says the preacher here. Look at verses 11 and 12. They're very plain, aren't they? They show us the preacher refusing a message that is woefully simplistic.

The words of true truth, God's truth, are like goads. To prick us. To respond. They're strong words, hard as nails.

[33 : 00] Hammered in. To fix our lives safely and certainly. See, whoever the collectors are, whoever the speakers are, it's says the words come from one source, verse 11, from the one shepherd, from God himself.

And God always faces human beings with the stark realities of life, just as the preacher does all the way through this book. Life is vexing, it's perplexing, it's painful.

And it is so because of our mortality. We can't control it. We have to learn to live with it, coming to terms with our fragility and our transience on this earth. And more than that, there's so much misery that we cannot curtail in this world because of the tragedy of human sin.

Life can't be other, can it? And involving an awful lot of mess. Look at the world today. And even as Christian believers who trust God, we still have to come to terms, don't we, with the sheer transcendence of God.

That he is our creator, our sovereign. He can't be controlled. He can't be fathomed. Far less can he be tamed and domesticated to dance to our tune.

[34 : 16] Life, even for Christian believers, from beginning to end, will be filled with mysteries that we may never comprehend. That's reality. There's nothing trite, is there?

Nothing trivial. Nothing at all superficial about the true biblical gospel. There's no triumphalism anywhere. And yet, you see, as well as all of that stark realism, there is wonderful hope and there is real triumph.

Because life is more than just this ephemeral, enigmatic world under the sun. There is eternity. It's witnessed in our heart.

And it's witnessed all the time in the preacher's many words of hope that tell us that there is a purpose. That life is not just about mortality and mystery and misery. Life has meaning.

And it has real joy to boot. And that too is the true truth of the Bible and its gospel. But you see, paradoxically, there can only be real joy in this world when we understand fully our mortality.

[35 : 33] Our life in this baffling world is transient. But that is not all there is. This is not as good as it gets. There is an eternal dimension above the sun.

And verse 14, notice God will bring every deed into judgment. Everything that's seen and everything that's unseen. Every secret thing. There is triumph of the eternal purpose of God.

And that is the ultimate answer to the transience of man and the tragedy of our sin. An answer to life with all its enigmas, with all its evil, with all its vexations and perplexities.

And that answer can be found even now, he's telling us. Even here, in this world, under the sun, when we fear God. When we remember our creator by responding to his words of delight and his words of truth.

That is when we throw all of our trust on him. And when we submit to him, fear him, worship him. When we listen to him. When we obey him. That is the whole truth, says verse 13, about what it means to be a human being.

[36 : 48] It's the whole duty, the whole of mankind. The secret and the purpose of human life.

In all its rich fullness, in all its glory, as it meant to be. That's where it's found. That's the only way to significance now, in our mortal existence, but also beyond.

Beyond the sun, above the sun, beyond the judgment. That awaits every single human being, he says, who's created. And that's what verses 13 and 14 are telling us. See, the preacher's revealing a message that is absolutely not simplistic, but is wonderfully simple.

That there is a way, there is one way, to that true life of meaning and significance and fullness and destiny. A life of true humanity now, and a life of true hope forever.

And it's so simple, you see, it lies simply in listening to his voice alone. The one shepherd. Man doesn't live by bread alone, says Moses, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

[38 : 01] There's so many competing voices, aren't there, in this world, purporting to offer fulfilling life and meaning and so on. That's what verse 12 is talking about, all these endless books. Philosophies, ideals, religions are plenty.

Of making many books, there's no end. There's no end of voices telling you how to find life, but they are to no end and to no purpose. They'll lead you nowhere. People are wearying themselves all over the world, chasing after all these sorts of things, but they're just chasing the wind.

In the end, it's just vain. It's empty. It's meaningless. But the words of the one shepherd are so, so different. What a contrast there is in the total simplicity of the true revelation of the one true God.

There's no mystery. There's no secrets. There's no endless, wearisome searching to find the meaning of life. Now look at verse 11. The words of truth are given, given by the one shepherd himself, they're made public to everyone, anyone who will listen.

And they have been right from the very beginning of man's history, haven't they? Beginning of Hebrews says, long ago, in many ways and at many times, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but he continued to speak right up until these last days in which he has spoken to us ultimately in his son, Jesus Christ.

[39 : 31] Words of delight to every weary soul, seeking meaning and purpose. I am the good shepherd, he said. I've come that you may have life in all its abundant fullness.

I'm the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be safe. He will find pasture. Come to me, all you who labor and are weary with life's vexations, and I will give you rest.

You see, the preacher of Ecclesiastes here is pointing us to the eternal, unchanging gospel of God, which is now fulfilled at last in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd.

Listen to him, he's saying. Obey him, the one shepherd. Keep his commandments. That's the whole of what it means to be truly human. And in the end, that's the only thing that matters in life, and, verse 14, the only thing that will matter in the judgment to come.

Don't be confused, by the way, as though this talk of obeying God's commandment is somehow different from the New Testament gospel, or different at all. Jesus' own climactic words in his own public ministry at the end of John Gospel chapter 12 say exactly the same thing.

[40 : 49] The Father who sent me has given me a commandment, and I know that this commandment is eternal life. He says the same things later on, doesn't he, to his disciples in the upper room.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

It's the same gospel. It's the word of sovereign command from our creator and our Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.

Have no other gods before him. The theologian Emil Brunner says, whenever anyone really listens to the first commandment and admits its reality, he already possesses the whole truth that the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ contain.

There is no other gospel than this command. Faith is obedience. Nothing else. Nothing else at all. See, the one shepherd, the great shepherd, Jesus Christ said, my sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

[41 : 57] They obey me. I gave them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

It's his commandment that is life, abundant life, whole, fulsome life in this world and forever beyond the judgment to come.

The words that I have spoken to you, said Jesus, are spirit and life. Friends, if we've heard his voice, the voice of the one shepherd, Jesus, if we've obeyed it, bowed down to Jesus Christ as your Lord, as your shepherd, that is to have found the life that you were created for.

That's to have found the whole destiny that your deepest heart is yearning for. I quoted last week Professor Frank Furedi, who's written so much on this whole contemporary culture of ours, of fear and foreboding.

Let me quote once again his analysis at the end of his book, How Fear Works, of how we view our humanity and our world today. He says this, the theme of human fragility dominates popular culture.

[43 : 15] Such sentiments are conveyed in a therapeutic language that suggests that people are fragile, damaged, scarred for life, broken. How did we arrive at this moment in history in which humanity is more technically powerful than ever before, and yet we feel ourselves to be increasingly fragile?

And he concludes his whole book this way. The outlook of our contemporary culture, he says, cannot inspire society. It can provoke fear, anxiety, outrage and suspicion, but it cannot gain people's trust and commitment.

Most important of all, it lacks the ability to engage with people's deep idealism and their aspiration for hope. That's so evidently true, isn't it?

But we have a hope, a living hope, a certain hope in the life-giving words of the one shepherd, the son of God. His word, his command is the sure path from vulnerable fragility to venturesome faith

all through our earthly lives.

Not through an escapist fantasy, not something that pretends away the pain and the perplexity of the world this side of the sun, no. But in a sure and certain hope, in an anchor that is above the sun, in the judgment to come, when this whole passing world is gone and done.

[44 : 46] But even now, you see, in the true life that is in Jesus Christ, there is a way of bountiful blessing amid the baffling struggles of life.

There's a way of venturesome joy all through life's vexed journey. And there is gain, there is solid joy and lasting treasure all along the path of our toil in this life, as Paul said to the Corinthians. Because in the Lord, none of our labors are in vain. None of it is fleeting and fading. All of it will outlast the sun. If it's labor in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you see, that joy will come only when your search for gain in this world alone comes to an end. Because you've seen that it is vain, that it is fleeting. It comes to an end when you have heard and heeded the command of the one shepherd.

Ignore him. And your life will be wearisome. And futile. And full of vexation.

[45 : 57] Full of sound and fury. Signifying nothing. But hear him and honor him. Remember him. Rejoice in him. And you will know life in all its abundant joy.

All throughout this life, under the sun and forever. When this passing world is done. In the glory of his everlasting kingdom.

Remember your creator. Live in the life-giving purpose of God. Amen.

Let's pray. Words of delight. Words of truth given by one shepherd. The great shepherd of the sheep. How we thank you, Lord, that you have given us the commandment, which is eternal life.

And so grant us, we pray, in listening to your command. To honor your call on our lives. So that we may know true life. True humanity.

[47 : 04] And do so both now and forever. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Amen.