

Christo Deus

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on October 21, 2018

This morning we are turning to the seventh sermon in our ten part series on the book of Ecclesiastes. Written by Solomon, Ecclesiastes is the reflection of a king of Israel near the end of his days where he ponders the meaning of life. Today's reading is from Ecclesiastes, chapter nine, verses one through twelve.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

9 All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them 2 is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun. 7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. 8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. 9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going. 11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. 12 For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

In Yuval Hurari's best selling and highly acclaimed book, "Homo Deus," he argues that humanism has been the global religion for the last two hundred years.

In order to back this claim, Hurari, who is a professor of history at the University of Jerusalem, chronicles in detail how the belief in God as the foundational assumption upon which all knowledge is based, fell out of favour among the intellectual elite during the time of the Enlightenment, which began in the mid 1600's.

In the place of God, the individual human being emerged as the basis upon which all truth was established. While it took hundreds of years for the transition to take place, Hurari states we now live in a world, where all the power systems of the world, including the global

governments, science, the education system, the economic system, and even most of the existing world religions have submitted themselves to the central creed of humanism. Again, the core precept of humanism is that the individual human being is the source of all truth. Not God. Stated one more time, in traditional religion, truth is established from above, by God. In the humanist religion, truth comes from within.

Thus, in humanist thought, we do not look to God to establish a ruler, as in days of old, we look to ourselves, because the people know best. Truth comes from within. In the realm of science, theology is no longer considered the queen of the sciences, as it was prior to the Reformation. It has been discarded and replaced by human observations. Truth comes from within. In education we do not teach our young people to accept ancient doctrines from inspired texts, we teach them to think for themselves. Truth comes from within. In the world of economics everyone pays homage to the almighty customer, because we all know that the customer is always right. Truth comes from within. In our personal lives, the big decisions of love, family, occupation, and leisure are guided by the directive to do what feels right. Truth comes from within.

Four hundred years ago, this conviction was only held by the intellectual elite of the world. Today, this belief has become the cornerstone of every aspect of our public and private lives. Given this reality, is it any wonder that people find God, and the church irrelevant? Given this reality is it any wonder that so many claim to be spiritual, but, not religious? After all, even today's seekers are looking to find God on their own terms, because, truth comes from within.

While it has only been in the last few hundred years that humans have actively sought to re-organize all of life based on a worldview where humans and not God are the source of all knowledge, within the hearts of people, this battle has been going on since the beginning of time. In the book of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon ponders the meaning of life, he is wrestling with this very issue.

As the reader will note, in Ecclesiastes, the term "under the sun" is used twenty seven times. In today's reading, it occurs five times. This term is a reference to the physical world, which is the habitation of humans. This stands in contrast to heaven, which is over the sun, and is the home of God who lives in the spiritual world. Because these worlds are so far apart, the natural tendency of human beings is to live their lives as if God does not exist. Stated another way, when the world is viewed from the human experience, that is, from the perspective of being under the sun, it appears as if God is not there, and that all of life is governed by chance.

This in essence, is what Solomon is saying in today's reading. As Solomon notes in verses one through three, no matter what we do in life, whether it is good or bad, we all die and our bodies go to the grave. This is an observation he has made several times before in Ecclesiastes.

In verses four through six he notes it is better to be above ground than below ground. It is

better to be alive than to be dead. For in the world, under the sun, even a living nobody is better off than a dead somebody.

In verses seven through ten Solomon tells us to enjoy life to the fullest, because once you are dead, your time has run out. So, make the most of it.

In verses eleven and twelve, Solomon observes that death comes at an unexpected time. No one knows when their clock will expire. We are all subject to time and chance.

As Solomon says these things, it is important that we keep in mind that he is very aware that there is a God in heaven, who is intimately involved in the affairs of the world. This he knows from reading the law of Moses, and from his personal experience. After all, Solomon knew the stories of how God created the universe. He knew how God made Adam and Eve and walked with them in the garden. He knew about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and how God was with them. He knew about Moses and the Exodus and how God delivered His people. He knew about the judges whom God raised up. He knew about his father David, and how God took him from the fields tending sheep and made him king over Israel. And Solomon knew how God had appointed him to be ruler over Israel, and how God had established him and prospered his ways.

All these things were confirmed when God spoke to Solomon personally at the beginning of his reign as king. These things were further confirmed when Solomon stood in the manifest presence of God, who filled the Temple with His glory during the dedication ceremony that occurred after the Temple was built.

This means that even as Solomon describes what life looks like under the sun and how it appears as if God is absent, and that the righteous and the wicked share the same fate, and that time and chance govern the affairs of life, he knows without question that these statements are not true. In the closing verses of Ecclesiastes, Solomon confirms this, but we will save that for the final sermon in the series.

So, given that Solomon knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything that he has stated in today's reading is false, why does he express these thoughts? Why is he feeling these thoughts?

In a nutshell, I believe his sin, is at the root of the problem. While in many ways Solomon was a righteous man, and in many ways he was a good and noble king, his heart was divided and it led to his downfall. To use his own words, from the conclusion of chapter nine, "as dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour."

Stated another way, while Solomon possessed much wisdom and honour, the dead flies in his life, the sin in his life, was overpowering. This is what made him feel like God was absent in

the world, even though he knew it not to be true. This is what made him feel like the fate of the righteous and the wicked were the same, even though he knew this was false. This is what made him feel like all life was governed by the laws of time and chance even though God had shown him otherwise.

For when we live life as if God does not exist, even if it is only in one area of our lives, it will produce a darkness in our hearts, that overtime will become overbearing. When we live life as if God does not exist, even if it is only in one area of our lives, our thoughts will be changed, and we will perceive our world as though God does not exist, even though we know that He does.

This is the problem that Solomon faced. And this is the problem that we face in the world today. For even as the vast majority of the world claims to believe in God or in a higher power, we act as though He doesn't exist. In fact, we have gone so far as to organize all the key institutions that govern human affairs upon the premise of an absent God. This is the key observation that Hurari makes in his book, "Homo Deus" and I fully agree with his assessment. Furthermore, lest you think Hurari's thoughts are the opinions of a fringe radical, his book has received glowing endorsements from the New York Times, Bill Gates, Barack Obama, and Angela Merkel, just to name a few. As the title of his book indicates, when it comes to the important matters of life, we believe in Homo Deus, we believe that truth comes from within, and we are pretty full of ourselves.

And yet, no matter how hard we try, we cannot escape the truth that we all know in the core of our being. There is a God in heaven. We will be held accountable for our actions in life. There is more to existence than the seventy odd years we live on earth. God is the ruler of His universe, not time and chance.

We know these things. Solomon knew these things. And yet, like Solomon, we often find ourselves struggling with pessimism and nihilism. And how could we not, when we have been conditioned by all our social institutions to live our lives on our own terms, because truth comes from within? It seems like an impossible task.

And yet, by the grace of God, we have hope. For as God spoke into the darkness and created light, as God hovered over the chaotic waters and brought forth land and all living creatures, as God cleansed the world with a flood and brought forth new life, as God raised a holy people from a godless world, as God sent his only begotten Son into a sick and dying world so that we may have life; as God has done in the past, we possess the hope that God will act in the present and that God will act in the future. Not because of who we are. Not because of what we have done. But because God is good, and because God is just, and because God is love we have eternal hope. Thus, as His chosen people may our lives reflect this hope and may we be a light in the world where God has called us to serve. All for His glory. Amen.