

THE WAY OF WISDOM: CONTENTMENT #4 (Peter Burton)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Ecclesiastes 1:1-9

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!"

What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

I Timothy 6:6-10

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

It has been said that there is only one thing worse than not getting what you want and that is getting what you want. . . and then realising that it doesn't bring satisfaction. Rabbi Harold S. Kushner perhaps best sums up the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes (In Hebrew, *Qoheleth*, meaning The Teacher, or The Preacher) in the title of his book, "When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough". "Everything is meaningless", says the Teacher. The Hebrew literally means, "Everything is mere breath". "Dust in the wind", wrote Kerry Livgren (from the American prog rock band Kansas), "Everything is dust in the wind."

- *What has been your experience of reading or studying this most unusual book of the Bible? Have you ever read Ecclesiastes? What did you make of it? Did you find it... Strange? Depressing? Confusing? Enlightening? Brilliant?*
- *Pete Burton quoted the Pink Floyd song "Time", T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton", and Samuel Johnson writing about chasing the sun. Can you think of other works in popular (or even unpopular) culture which echo themes from Ecclesiastes? (Any novels, plays, poems, songs, movies, or other art works etc.)*
- *'The Teacher' writes, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless." (Ecclesiastes 5:10). When Philippine Dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, was deposed in 1986, his wife Imelda was found to have amassed a collection of around 3,000 pairs of shoes. What is enough? What might the things we collect tell us about ourselves?*
- *Pete said, "the big lie of more in my life is that I think contentment or fulfilment lies in knowing more – reading more – understanding more – buying more books!" What does "the lie of more" look like for you? How do we recognise "the lie" especially when we desire more of a genuinely good thing?*
- *The 17th century French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Do you find it hard to stop and be still – to sit quietly alone in a room? St. Augustine wrote, "O Lord, our hearts are restless until they rest in you." In what ways are you restless and "chasing after the wind"? (Ecclesiastes 4:6)*
- *What do you think Pete means when he says, "True contentment is found in the ability to enjoy the gifts God gives to us"? What gifts are you thankful for? What good gifts are you overlooking?*
- *What do you think 'The Teacher' means when he writes that God "has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart"?*