

When on Earth, Live Like You're in Heaven

'A little girl goes up to a preacher one day to confess her sins. "I believe I am guilty of the sin of vanity", the girl told the preacher. To which the preacher responds "Why do you think that?" The girl tells him, "Well, every morning I look at myself in the mirror and think about how beautiful I am". Then the preacher [gives her a good look and] tells the girl, "Oh don't worry, that's not a sin. That's just a mistake".'

Mistake or not, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as the saying goes. There's truth in that, for, as another saying goes, one person's junk is another person's treasure. Unfortunately, our modern society, worldwide to varying degrees, is obsessed with looks. Different societies have different standards of what's beautiful and handsome, but in all, there are varying degrees of pressure to be attractive. No society, even surpassing America, is more obsessed with beautiful skin than South Korea. More cosmetic surgery is performed there than anywhere else in the world. Talk about an obsession. While studies have shown that attractive people have an easier time in life (getting promoted sooner, easier assignments, generally more favorable treatment) than those who aren't so "blessed" in the looks department, the preoccupation with it by so many people has truly become a neurosis in

wealthy societies across the globe. Just like King Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes 1:8: “No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content”, those who have wealth or beauty or stuff always want more. They are never satisfied. For there is always someone else who has more, or better, than everybody else. And so no one is content. No one has peace.

We begin today a series from the Book of Ecclesiastes, during which the entire book will be read. I doubt that’s ever happened here before. But in just this first chapter, we find it chock full of truth and wisdom. What we also find is a vital caveat regarding wisdom and its usefulness. Recall that King Solomon asked God for wisdom when he ascended the throne of Israel. And God gave him such wisdom that no one before or since has ever been so wise. So wise, in fact was he, that dignitaries and royalty made long, arduous journeys from far and wide just to hear Solomon speak. Among them was the famous Queen of Sheba, with whom Solomon apparently had a love child, which became the ancestor of all the east African Jews who are only now making *aliyah*, that is, return to the Jewish homeland.

Over half of the Book of Proverbs comes from Solomon’s hand, and it is priceless wisdom indeed. But Ecclesiastes also comes from his hand, and the tone here is decidedly gloomier. There is just as much truth here in Ecclesiastes as in Proverbs, but reading it can result in despair. If both Proverbs and Ecclesi-

astes are true about wisdom, why the stark contrast? Wisdom is exalted in Proverbs, but here it's seemingly denigrated. Why? Well, the answer can be found in Proverbs itself; multiple times in fact. Recall just the first of these no less than 15 verses there, which teach about the "fear of the Lord", which says in 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". Just that one verse shows us that the presence of God, the respectful acknowledgement of Him and His Lordship, is the hinge which determines whether wisdom is beneficial or just plain bad. Proverbs goes on and on about the absolute necessity of anchoring one's life continuously on the Lord and the things of God. Ecclesiastes, apparently written when Solomon was much older, and shall we say it?, much less wise, reveals a man who has forgotten his own advice. Here is a man whose vast wealth, power, luxuries and 1000 foreign wives and concubines have gone to his head. He has all but forgotten God, and now all his wisdom reveals is the absolute depravity of human existence when divorced from its Creator God.

And therein lies its "wisdom". If people ever need reminding, and heaven knows most of us need reminding every day, then reading Ecclesiastes should remind us just how miserable, and ultimately hellish, life on earth is without God. As His creatures, we were never designed to live independently of Him. Not just us, but everything and all creatures He has made, are all designed and hardwired to be forever connected to Him to continuously receive our very life-sustenance. For without our "abiding in the

Vine”, we shrivel up, dry up, and die. Eternally. Without the presence, the life of God, flowing through us, we necessarily drift ever farther from the source of all Life and Light, and ever closer to the circling, darkening drain that, upon our physical deaths, drops us right into the center of the darkness of hell. Forever.

Living in Holy Spirit’s presence every minute of every day is essential for our eternal health and wellbeing. But the question is, do we? We know all sorts of people who not only ignore God, but don’t even acknowledge He exists. How ridiculous! If He doesn’t exist, how do any of us have life? It’s the most asinine thing to imagine that somehow we either created ourselves, or that life just evolved into being. Yet we live in a world in which just about everything is gaslighted. In other words, we’re living in a world of lies, constructed in large part by the father of lies, the devil himself. And because we’re born into and live in such a world of smoke and mirrors, it’s all but impossible for us to realize that what we’re seeing and hearing is not true. But as Christians, who’ve received the very Spirit of Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the impossible has become possible for us. And not just possible, but necessary and required if we’re to ever escape the lies and live in the glorious light of Truth.

This is why our Lord and Savior taught us in Luke 12:22-23 and 25: “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing”.

“Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And if worry can’t accomplish a little thing like that, what’s the use of worrying over bigger things?” In verse 29 He commands us, “don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things”. Because, in 30-31 He tells us, “These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and He will give you everything you need”.

This world, actually the devil of this world, is constantly using every means available to scream into our eyes and ears, to convince us that this is all there is, or if not that, then, at least, that this is all that really matters, because when we die, that’s all there is. We die, we’re caput. Eventually, no one remembers us, and that’s ultimately true. On this earth. But it’s not true for God, and all His children. If this life is all there is, then as Paul said in I Corinthians 15:19, “If we have hoped in Christ only in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied”. This earthly life is a necessary introductory chapter to our real life which is to come, and which is already begun inside us by virtue of Holy Spirit’s living in us. If we’ve given our lives to Christ Jesus, the Lord and Savior of Everyone and Everything who acknowledges Him, then Heavenly Life is already coursing through our veins. We just need to realize that and let it flow!

Do we relate to this world, to other people, as if this is all there is? That there is no God? And even if there is, that He’s

not relevant to day-to-day living? That we get up in the morning, and go about our daily routines, and live our lives, just like millions and even billions of other people on this earth, every day? Do we believe what the news tells us? Do we obey everything the government tells us? Do we trust our authorities more than we trust God and His Word? What did we just read that our Lord explicitly told us in Luke 12:29-30: “And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and He will give you everything you need”. Do we believe Him? We live such cushy lives here in America. The abundance of food, and things available to buy on the cheap would be unimaginable to people living even just a hundred years ago. Only those who’ve lost everything in the recent floods have any real inkling of what it means to really have to trust God and take Him at His word. But do even they know? The government programs and social service agencies, some Christian, have already stepped in and are providing their necessities of life. As they should. And so, even in such temporary crises of life, we here have little “need” to truly trust God. Yet, it’s only as we live as if we’re in Heaven now, that we truly live and serve God’s Kingdom while here on earth. The stark contrast between the way the world thinks and the way we live must be evident to all.

So truly trust in Him. And actually live like it!

