

Ecclesiastes 11 and 12; 2 Timothy 2: 1-7

Introduction ...

I would advise against reading the book of Ecclesiastes if you are feeling down and depressed! Here's what one commentator – **Robert Fyall** writes:

The world of Ecclesiastes carries a sense of futility at the origin and purpose of creation ... it is more than private grief – it is a profound weariness and pessimism at the futility, the vanity and the meaninglessness of the universe.

What is this book doing in the Bible and what are we to make of it?

One way to look at it is this:

It's a kind of 'John the Baptist' book. By demonstrating the final emptiness of life without God ... it forces us to consider God.

In Chapters 1 to 3 – the writer – known as Mr Preacher, outlines his basic thesis of the futility of life 'under the sun' ... whilst giving some hints of a world beyond that.

Then in Chapters 4 – 10, he relentlessly analyses every aspect of life – private and public ... and then we come to tonight's passage:

More hope ...

In the final 2 chapters – we have a few glimmers of hope ... though still fairly obscure ones: **take verse 5 of Chapter 11:**

'Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know (or perhaps understand) the work of God, who makes everything.'

The first breath of a newborn baby is an awesome, beautiful, and joyful occasion ... so as I said – some glimmer of hope.

But the book ends:

The end of the matter; all has been said (and remember much of this was about doom and gloom ... the futility of human endeavour) Fear God and keep his commandments, for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgement – including every secret thing, whether good or evil.'

Such teaching can lead to religious duty born of the fear of punishment ... which is why, for Christians, the Old Testament must always be read through the lens of the New.

It's not that the New Testament overlooks the difficulties of living in this world – but through the work of Jesus, we're offered strength and purpose.

As an example in tonight's short passage:

2 Timothy 2: 1 – 7 ...

Sufferings are not overlooked in **verse 3** ... but both before and after come verses of hope –

Verse 1 – Be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ

PTO

'Grace' meaning all that God gives us: *'God's riches at Christ's expense' ...*

And v 7 – 'the Lord will give you understanding'

We can recall that Jesus did not say: **Fear God and keep his commandments ...**

He said: **'Love God ... and your neighbour as yourself'** and he said: **'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'**

Love comes first and gives us the motivation we need to keep his commandments ... not motivation from fear but from love.

This is why a prayer of St Ignatius ends:

Give me only the love of you

and your grace

That is enough for me.

Conclusion ...

So – although there is wisdom within the book of Ecclesiastes ... beware of reading it if you're feeling down or depressed ... and only read it through the lens of the New Testament – although it's perhaps worth pointing out that one verse of **Chapter 12** is much beloved of over-burdened students – especially students of theology:

'Of making many books, there is no end and much study is a weariness of the flesh!'

Amen.