



Dear Church Family,

This Sunday we are looking at the reality that all toil (unpaid or paid work or service) does not have ultimate meaning unless it is done for the glory of God.

Everyone imagines accomplishing things, and everyone finds him or herself largely incapable of producing them. Everyone wants to be successful rather than forgotten and everyone wants to make a difference in life. But that is beyond the control of any of us. If this life is all there is, then everything will eventually burn up in the death of the sun and no one will be around to remember anything that has ever happened. Everyone will be forgotten, nothing we do will make any difference, and all good endeavours, even the best will come to nothing. This is what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 1 v 3: *'What does man gain by all the toil*

at which he toils under the sun?'

.... unless there is God.

If the God of the Bible exists, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavour, even the simplest ones, pursued in God's calling, can matter forever. That is what the Christian faith promises. *'..in the Lord, your labour is not in vain'*, writes Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 58b. He was speaking of Christian ministry, but this is ultimately true for all work and service paid or unpaid.

One day the whole creation will be renewed and all our efforts for the sake of Jesus in raising our families, or serving the church or the community or in providing goods and services are glimpses that we are working for things that will have eternal value. So if we work or serve to bring justice one day there will be perfect justice in the new heavens and the new earth. If we work to support the bereaved or the lonely or the elderly or those struggling with their mental health, one day there will be perfect healing and harmony. If we work to foster good relationships and community in our school or home or workplace one day in heaven, there will be perfect harmony in community.

Let this hope transform all our work and service today.

Blessings

Martin

Do we labour in vain?

Ecclesiastes 1 v 3 - 11

2nd May 2021

The Russian author of War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy, had an existential crisis around the age of 50. In his book 'A confession' he tells how he was leading a very successful life until about 50 and he began to realize that every loved one would be taken away from him and all he had written would eventually be forgotten. In the light of this he asks the question, "Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy". He also asked: "How can we fail to see this? That is what is surprising! One can only live while one is intoxicated with life; as soon as one is sober it is impossible not to see that it is all a mere fraud and a stupid fraud!"

Tolstoy could not now go back to writing his novels and loving his family, because the lack of any objective, lasting meaning had dawned on him.

The book of Ecclesiastes asks us to imagine how fulfilling things can possibly be if what we see in this world and life is 'all that is or ever was or ever will be'. If this world is all there is, ultimately the sun will die and all human life will be wiped away by the sands of time and there will be no one to remember anything that ever happened. This is a devastating insight. It means that if life under the sun is all that there is, whether you spend your life helping people or committing evil, in the end it makes no difference. If human beings really are going back to nothing, we should admit that nothing we do matters. Even believers today are shaped by the secular culture's complete emphasis on happiness here and now, this world benefits. But we should not be. The fleeting pleasures of life are senseless, useless and insignificant if we try to live without reference and gratitude to God.

This is exactly the question Solomon asks in verse 3:

*'What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

From a life full of labour and toil under the sun, people gain absolutely nothing. The word 'gain' conveys the idea of something left over, remaining at the end. It refers to the human desire to show a profit, to be in the black, financially or otherwise. The question I'm asking at the end of my life, what will the surplus be? What will I leave behind that will count as a lasting monument to all my effort? Solomon illustrates that nothing we do under the sun counts in any truly lasting sense by showing that we can't change the repetitive cycles of nature including the reality of death.

You'll be pleased to know I hope that we won't end it there because Solomon wouldn't want us to finish there. Solomon is deliberately provoking us to see that life without a relationship with God is futile and counts for nothing – remember the purpose of Ecclesiastes in 12 v 13: *'The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man'*. Only fearing God by obeying him will give us eternal meaning and purpose.

So after showing that life without God counts for nothing, we will then explore how God can make all things new and then how we can live new lives of purpose in the light of eternity.

Life counts for nothing because it is Repetitive

If you read Ecclesiastes 1 v 4 - 10 aloud you can feel the rhythm of its lyrics ebbing and flowing like the tide – that's the point. Everything either goes around and around, comes and goes; it rises and sets; what has been will be again; what has been done will be done again; what is present will soon be past. The point is that the world itself doesn't seem to go or get anywhere, for everything is cyclical rather than linear, so why should humans get anywhere?

The sun chases its tail. The wind goes to the south and comes back around again to the north. Streams flow into the sea, and the water evaporates, and then streams flow into the sea again and it is never full. People too are like the wind, the sun and the seas. Just as water pours into the ocean again and again without ever filling it, so the things of the world pour into human beings via their eyes and ears and back through their mouths and yet they never reach a point of complete satisfaction –

v8: *'All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled, with hearing'*.

Now at one level this is very positive. There is always more to see, more to learn, more to enjoy within creation. Curiosity in discovery how the world works can lead us to childlike wonder at the world in which we live, But these words are followed by verse 9:

*'What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun'.*

What Solomon is saying is that humans long to come across something new and novel in life, something that will break the constant repetitive cycle, something to say or hear that will be truly new – but there is nothing. No such thing exists. Whatever we see and hear has already been and gone, maybe in a different guise but basically the same as before. We see this in church life. There is always someone coming up with a seemingly new teaching or idea that will be the silver bullet to bring church growth. But some of these new teachings or ideas are heresies that have been tried in the past or are ideas that you can find in a different form in church history. We should beware of our culture's constant search for the new and novel because Solomon says there is nothing new under the sun.

Space travel is a good illustration of Solomon's point. He doesn't mean no new things are ever invented in the world, for that is clearly not true. He means that there is nothing new we can ever discover to break the cycle of repetition in the world that will satisfy us. When we conquer reaching one planet humanity will then try to conquer the next planet further away and the next. We never have our fill. There is nothing new about humanity in all our progress.

Remember Solomon's aim here. He is showing that at the end of the day, human beings gain nothing from all their toil under the sun.

Just to make sure we've got this point Solomon shows that even trying to leave a lasting legacy for future generations will come to nothing in the end – v 11:

*'There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after'.*

When people think about the next generation, they usually think in terms of progress, "Our children are our future", we say, "they will be able to accomplish things that go beyond anything we could ever dream." That may be the case but ultimately, says Solomon, soon the younger generation will become the older generation and then there will be a generation after that. If we say that we are looking to leave a legacy or example to future generations, in the short term this is a good thing and a worthy purpose. But because the solar system will cool down and the universe will collapse, then eventually all legacies and generations will come to an end. This is the crisis Leo Tolstoy discovered.

How then can we leave a lasting legacy?

The God who makes 'all things new'

If there is no lasting profit to anything we do, what hope is there? Thankfully Solomon paints a deliberately gloomy picture of life under the sun to bring us to a crisis. He wants us to see that life under the sun is not all there is. There is a God in Heaven who rules over the sun. Solomon wants us to become weary with life under the sun so we will not expect to find meaning and satisfaction in earthly things, but only in God himself. This does not mean that if we believe in God all our troubles will be over or that we

will never again feel the weariness and vanity of life under the sun. But Ecclesiastes does open up the possibility of an 'above the sun' perspective that can bring joy and refreshment to life. One way to see this is the new perspective on creation that God gives us. The psalmist can look at the repetitive cycle of the sun rising and setting and see the joy and strength of its Creator – Psalm 113 v 3:

*'From the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the Lord is to be praised!*

The repetition that we see in nature is a testimony to the goodness and orderliness of God. The regularity of the created world shows the constancy of its Creator. The winds blow at his bidding, the waters flow at this command and this is for the blessing of every creature – Psalm 104 v 3:

*'He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;
he makes the clouds his chariot;
he rides on the wings of the wind;*

So when we see the seemingly endless repetitive cycle of the seasons we can praise God like Jeremiah who said – Lamentations 3 v 22 - 23:

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness'.*

The God who rules over the sun is always doing something new. There is a 'new covenant' in the blood of Jesus Christ Luke 22 v 20: *'And likewise the cup after they had eaten saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"'*. This is the blood Jesus shed on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins. There is the new life that came up from the empty tomb when Jesus rose from the dead. There is the 'new heart' that God gives to everyone who believes in Jesus. There is the 'new creation' that the Holy Spirit brings about in the life of someone who trusts in Jesus.

One day God will make new heavens and a new earth. The Bible promises that when this weary old world is destroyed, God will make new heavens and a new earth. This promise gives hope to the people of God and enables us to persevere even when we are weary. Life's frustrations will not last forever; we live in the hope of a new day.

Living new lives of purpose

The truth is that nothing we do or create in this life will ever fully satisfy us or rescue us from death or free us from the reality that in the final analysis we can never change anything or make a lasting difference. Everything will come to an end and so everything is vanity.

But in the light of eternity everything we do as followers of Jesus does have eternal purpose. Jesus said in Matthew 6 v 19 - 20: *'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal'.*

It is possible for all our toil and creativity here on earth to count for eternity and for us to store up treasure in heaven when our lives are governed by seeking to live under God's rule, eg, every attempt to provide wealth and employment, every attempt to bring justice, every attempt to befriend the lonely, every attempt to support the bereaved and those struggling with mental health when done for Jesus' glory and in his name - will one day be perfected and will be stored up as treasure in heaven. Revelation 21 talks about the truth that one day God will renew the heavens and the earth – Rev 21 v 1 - 4: *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,*

and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away".

There is a future healed world that God will bring about and your work and service as a Christian are showing it in part to others.

Whatever you are seeking in your toil and service, whether in bringing justice or helping others achieve their potential, or helping people find fulfilling friendships or in bringing healing or in leading people to know Jesus – all of this will one day be brought to fulfilment. In the city of God there will be peace, joy, beauty, justice and friendship in full. Our work and service will be only partially successful on our best days in bringing this world about. But in the city of God the beauty, the harmony, the justice, the comfort, the joy, the healing and community you seek, will come to fruition. If you know all this, you won't be despondent in this life when you don't achieve everything you hoped for. You will work and serve with satisfaction and joy.

FOODBANK (no boxes out on Bank Holiday Monday)

You will be aware that the collection boxes for the Foodbank are on the church porch on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays during, approx, 9am - 4pm. Any donations can be left there and Evelyn will bring them into the church building to await delivery to the Foodbank warehouse. There is no obligation but if you do want to donate, the following items are the most needed:



Sponge puds; Custard; Tinned fruit; Washing powder; Jam; Washing up liquid; Paper towels; Dog food & Dog treats.

Thank you for all the support for foodbank.

MONDAY MORNING PRAYER MEETING

There will **not** be a prayer meeting on Monday next week as it is a Bank Holiday. These will resume on Monday 10th May.

Birthdays

We do not have any birthdays to put in the newssheet for May yet, so if you would like to have your birthday included, please let Evelyn know.

Would you like to have prayer after Sunday morning service?

Members of the Prayer Team are willing to pray with people after the Sunday morning service on Zoom. If you are interested, please text the number which will be shown on screen at the start of the service and you will be placed in a 'breakout room' soon after the end of the service. This means it is a private time between you and the prayer team. This is open to anyone who would like prayer.

CHURCH SERVICES UPDATES

Since the church reopened on Good Friday and attendance in person was allowed there has been an increase in numbers week on week, booked and not booked, that have attended. We are now very close to the maximum number allowed in the sanctuary; therefore, we need to know who wants to attend. If you intend to come to the church on a Sunday, please book a seat with the office by 4pm on the preceding Friday. We want to give priority to those who do not have the ability to join by zoom, to visitors and those who have booked. Once the sanctuary is full then we will use the additional seating in the church lounge, where the service can be viewed via zoom.

A reminder to all those attending in person:

- Masks **must** be worn at all times while inside the building unless exempt
- No singing is allowed by those attending
- A minimum of a two-chair gap must be maintained in each row between different households. Friends or family members not from the same household or bubble are not permitted to sit side by side without the minimum two-chair gap.
- The seats on the left-hand side of the sanctuary are subject to a draft from the open windows. These are opened for ventilation purposes in accordance with BU and government guidelines.
- During open prayer times please raise your hand if you would like to pray out loud and a microphone will be brought to you. Please do not touch or hold the microphone.

Preaching and Small Group Series:

The current series is 'Why Everything Matters' from the book of Ecclesiastes

May 2nd	Do we labour in vain? - Ecclesiastes 1 v 3 - 11
May 9th	Wisdom, Pleasure and Work - Ecclesiastes 1 v 12 – 2 v 26
May 16th	A time for Everything - Ecclesiastes 3 v 1 - 22
May 23rd	More 'Vanities' - Ecclesiastes 4 v 1 - 16
May 30th	In the Hand of God - Ecclesiastes 9 v 1 - 12
June 6th	Wisdom is better than folly - Ecclesiastes 11 v 7 – 12 v 8
June 13th	Remember your Creator - Ecclesiastes 12 v 9 - 14

The prayers for blessing below have been used in the Monday morning prayer meeting and at other times. You may want to pray this where you are in your part of the community to speak blessing over your neighbours and friends.

FFALD-Y-BRENIN
Prayers for Blessing

Heavenly Father, we take upon ourselves the mantle of authority that Jesus delegates to us and in His Name we speak to every household in this community and say to you:

'We bless you in the name of the Lord. We bless your marriages that they may be strong and whole. We bless the relationship between each marriage partner that it may be loving, forgiving, merciful and strong. We bless every intergenerational relationship within each household that there may be peace and love and understanding flowing between each one.

In Jesus' name we bless every network of wholesome and supportive friendship.

We bless your health that you may be strong and well. In Jesus' name we resist any sickness or disease which seeks to invade this community and to every person in the community, we say, be well, be strong, be healthy. To any who are sick right now we say, we bless you in Jesus' name with a speedy recovery.

We bless your wealth that you may have plenty to replace poverty. We bless you to have enough to live and enough to give. We bless the work of your hands that whatever you turn your hand to which is wholesome may be profitable. We bless every wholesome enterprise that is conducted by you that it may prosper and be successful. We bless local businesses. We bless the work of local charities. We bless those who work in local government. We bless those who serve our local community.

We bless the local schools that they may be secure, safe places for teachers and pupils alike. We bless the children's capacity to learn and develop relationships and we bless their simple trust in Jesus, that their trust may grow and become enriched.

We speak to the churches in our community and we say we bless you in the name of the Lord that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God may flow out from you in power. We bless the hearts of all who live in the community that you may be quickened to hear and respond to the voice of the Living God. We bless all who live and work here, that the overflow of the blessings of the presence of the Kingdom of God may fall upon you".

Amen.

Heathervale Baptist Church
Heathervale Road, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey. KT15 3NW
Phone: 01932 343588
Email: admin@heathervale.org.uk www.heathervale.org.uk

