

**FINDING JOY - BITTER TRUTHS**  
**Tragic Hope Series - Part 1**  
**Dan Burrell**

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*“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north, around, and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 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. Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new?” It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.”*

Good morning Life Fellowship. We are a church that is committed to teaching the whole counsel of God. We teach the books about joy, we teach the books about hope, we teach the practical books, we teach the books with great stories of triumph and great admonition to the local church. But for the first time in the fifteen year history of our church we are going to look at the book of Ecclesiastes. This is a book that many people avoid, because in all honesty it is a difficult book. It is difficult to translate from the original in Hebrew. It is difficult to interpret, both in light of its original context and in light of where we are today. And it is difficult to kind of reconcile with the broader canon of Scripture.

But just because it is difficult doesn't mean we shouldn't try. And in fact the fact that we don't look into it leaves a lot of important truths on the table that a mature believer, a well-educated believer, a biblically literate believer may never consider. As you can kind of get the impression from hearing the first eleven verses earlier, it feels a little dark. It feels heavy. These are the words of an old man, a man who is reaching the end of his life and who has seen a lot of mountain peaks during that time. He has experienced a lot, and yet at the end he is saying that most of it was just smoke and mirrors. The language is unusual. There are words and phrases that are used in the book of Ecclesiastes that you will not find in any other book of the Bible. There are some words, by the way, that are found in the book of Ecclesiastes that are not even found in literature that was contemporary at that time. The ancient literature of those days didn't even use some of the phraseology and some of the words that are there.

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon who is arguably the wisest man at least to have ever ruled over Israel, and perhaps who has ever lived, according to Scripture. He had incredible power, intellect, money, influence and leadership skills, yet by the end of his life he was dried up and kind of cynical.

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I don't know about you, but have you ever known an old codger who has been through his entire life and turned into the quintessential grumpy old man? That is my prayer, not that I become that guy, but that I avoid becoming that guy. Some of you who are Generation X and older perhaps remember the Muppets. Remember the two old guys that sat up to the back of the Muppets and heckled everyone? Sometimes I have kind of aspired to be one of those guys. Some would claim that I have become one of those guys already.

No, in reality I don't want to be one of those guys when I get old, and just because my hair is getting greyer, and I have a few wrinkles, I am not old. Got it? I am not old, not even close yet. But the reality is time stands still for no one, and eventually we all will find ourselves on the balcony of life looking down on the young players, and we will want to hurl a few words of perspective to the young whippersnappers. And perhaps a little bit of that is what is going on in the life of King Solomon here in Ecclesiastes.

The name of the book is Ecclesiastes, which is an unusual name. But if we break it down it becomes rather familiar to us because Ecclesiastes is translated in the Greek as *Ekklisiastes*, and we would use it in terms of anything that involves an assembly. And in fact there are words that we use today derived from the Hebrew and also the Latin connection to it like *Iglesiates* which is Spanish. So Ecclesiastes, assembly, or we could say church, are all kind of the same word because basically it is a collection of people.

So what we have is an address to a collection of people and when you have this assembly that is gathered, the person who is giving the address is called 'the Preacher.' That is why we see even beginning in the very first verse of the passage '*the words of the Preacher.*' And then he identifies himself further as '*the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*' So we know that it was Solomon.

The themes are difficult to pin down. They kind of vary as the book progresses. There are moments in which the writer appears to be plumbing the depths of despair, and other times he appears to encourage the reader to live a full and joy filled life. As we studied for this, Ben and I, we have read a variety of commentaries to get their perspectives and we found that they have widely differing views on this book and what the overall meaning of it is.

Some argue that in his later years Solomon kind of became an agnostic, saying things like '*nothing matters, it is all empty, it is all vain, it is all just a bunch of smoke.*' Others say that he was very, very orthodox, saying that, '*at the end of your life you have to remember what is really real, what really matters, and it is all about God.*' Some others would say that this is just a book that is filled with the meanderings of a pessimist

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in his view of life and others. And also I read some that said that in the end they thought we might draw the conclusion that Solomon was an optimist at the end of his life.

My best attempt at trying to figure out a theme would be this: he is asking the question - 'Is life really worth living?' Or 'Can we find joy in this lifetime?' There seems to be these duelling messages of despair and emptiness juxtapositioned against vanity and insignificance. And then you have these other themes of hope and desire placed against pleasure and expectation. It is kind of like Solomon was experiencing some sort of late life existential crisis. And he was struggling between what he knew to be true and what he felt to be true.

And yet I do believe this - if you live long enough you may find yourself in that role as well. In fact you don't even have to live all that long, all you need to do is experience a year kind of like 2020. There may be a time when you just kind of step back and say: *'Really, what is life all about? I thought things were going well, the economy was booming, my kids were growing up, I had friends, the church was growing, and all these good things were going on. And then bam, out of nowhere things fell apart. Things we took for granted are not even within our grasp anymore. There is conflict, there is turmoil, and everywhere we turn when we think we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, it turns out to be a freight train, and here comes another wave of something or other.'*

So you don't have to be an old man, you don't have to be a king, you don't have to be the wisest person in the world, to get to a point every once in a while in your life where you say, *'What in the world is going on, God? What is happening here? Why is my life not unfolding the way that I dreamed it might?'*

We are going to be looking at the whole of the book of Ecclesiastes, and much of what I am going to do today is just to kind of set the framework for the rest of the series. Hopefully Pastor Ben is going to soon be back. I do want to give you a quick update on him. You know he had Covid and then he had pneumonia. And last Monday he came into the office for just a few moments and he said, *'Man, I am feeling so much better, but my wife told me not to overdo it.'* And I said, *'Don't you dare overdo it because I don't want you to relapse.'* And the next day he relapsed, and he had to go back to the doctor.

He has been getting some massive doses of antibiotics which make him sick, and he has been getting shots and so forth. I chatted with him last night and he thinks he is feeling better. And I told him, *'Dude, take it easy, okay? We need you, and we need you to be healthy.'* So please continue to pray for Pastor Ben and his hope is to be back soon. Until then we will keep right on plugging through.

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When he and I were kind of preparing this series, we figured out the theme for each week, but because Ecclesiastes is such an unusual book and it is not a book that is frequently studied, we kind of felt like we needed to kind of set the framework so you will understand its context, and then it will make more sense in the weeks to come as we study it chapter by chapter.

When you look at the whole book, there are some key words and phrases. Remember this, one of the rules of Bible study is look for the words that God repeats, because He is doing so for our benefit. So when He gives us these repetitive words, these phrases that pop up over and over again, He is trying to catch our attention. So I went through and I counted these words each time they were used. For instance, the word 'wisdom' or 'wise,' some derivative of wise, we find it used fifty-two times in the book of Ecclesiastes. The word 'man' is found forty-seven times. The word 'vanity,' and we will talk about that word in a little bit, was found thirty-seven times. The word 'labor' was found thirty-six times. The phrase 'under the sun' is found thirty times. And the word 'evil' is found twenty-two times. So those are some of the key words in Ecclesiastes.

And when you are reading this book it is important because it is again another rule of studying the Bible. So if you want to become someone who is biblically literate and understands the whole of Scripture, you have to understand that you don't read just a verse and take that, you don't read even a chapter and take that, you don't even read an entire book and simply take that. But you have to take it in context with the rest of the Bible.

One of the reasons why we know the Bible is a supernatural book, one of the reasons why the Bible is worthy of study by even people who don't profess to believe Christ, is the fact of the way it was constructed. It was written over a period of 1600 years by over forty different authors, many of whom did not know each other. And yet, the theme of Scripture is all the way through, even though there is a gap in the middle of hundreds of years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. But when you study it in its context, you will see that it fits together like a puzzle that is intricately designed, and it adds not only the mystery of how it came together, but of the substance, knowing that this is a book like no other book that has ever been written.

So when we study Ecclesiastes this is going to be important. It is not just one book that you would pull off of a shelf in a large library, but rather it is a portion of the greater work. There are sixty-six books in the Bible and they are all connected. And they are all telling us the same message and that is - we are sinners in need of a Savior. This is not all that there is, God created us and designed us for a purpose. And if you

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want to have fulfilment in life you need to live that purpose out. And the only way you can do that is by having a relationship with Him knowing that the best is yet to come. Every book of the Bible in its own way points us to God through Jesus with the hope of reconciliation with Him that we might have life eternal. And so in the book of Ecclesiastes we will look at it in that way as well.

Indeed 2020 is the perfect year to study this because you know at my age I will tell you this, I have never had a year like this. I like to talk about all the years of ministry experience and leadership I have enjoyed, and I can tell you I have never had a year more challenging than this year. Many of you are facing it on different levels whether you are a mom and dad who are trying to homeschool their kids virtually, or whether you are working from home and trying to keep everything together. Or maybe you lost your job as many people have. Maybe you find yourself confined unable to travel, and many of you are big travellers, and now all of a sudden you are stuck at home.

There are a lot of changes that have happened and let's just go ahead and throw in the most dramatic election most of us have ever seen in our lifetime. And all of the other things that have been happening in 2020 such as riots in the streets and economic uncertainty, so yeah, this is a good year to study Ecclesiastes. This is the year we need to get into it, because Solomon at the end of his life was looking back at all that he had accomplished.

He looked at all the good decisions he had made. And he looked at all the bad decisions he had made, like dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of wives and concubines for example, so that he could amass a big kingdom. He looked at all the things that he had built and the people he had ruled and the lands that he had conquered, and he stands on the precipice of his life and he says, *'Ah, just a bunch of smoke, vanity and emptiness.'* So we have to ask ourselves if this wisest man who has ever lived got to the end of his life after he had lived and applied all of his brain power then said that it is really nothing, maybe he is saying something that we need to learn and pay attention to in 2020.

Most of us live our lives looking forward. Do you remember what it was like when you were a kid, and I see some of our kids here and they working through their worship sheets, and I just love our kids. One of our little boys jumped out of the car this morning as I was walking up and he runs over to me and says, *'I got my hair cut, I got my hair cut.'* Kids are excited about everything, aren't they? It was his first haircut and he could not have been happier if he had received a million bucks, and he needed to share it with someone.

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And isn't that the way kids are? I mean kids look forward to their next birthday, they look forward to holidays, they look forward to the start of school, and they look forward to the end of school. I grew up in a culture where the impetus of the return of Christ was huge. I mean it was always like, *'Jesus is coming back any day.'* And I have to tell you as I was growing up I loved Jesus and I was interested in Him, but I wanted to kind of have Him work with me a little bit on His return, because there was some things I really wanted to do. I can literally remember saying, *'Lord, I want you to come back, and I love you and I want to be with you, but could you wait until I get my driver's license?'* (Laughter.)

That was a big one. And then it was until I get my first kiss. Yes, please Lord could you wait on that one a little bit. And then it was until I get married. And then until I had my kids. And I had all these things back then, but I am at that stage now where it is: *'Please Lord, come soon. Hurry and don't wait any longer.'* So for many, many years in my life I had all these things that I was looking forward to, that I wanted to experience in my life.

And that is the way we often spend our lives. Until one day we wake up, and we realize that everything that was on our bucket list, or everything that was on our 'I hope this happens' list has been pretty much accomplished. And to be honest, very few of those things turn out exactly the way we thought they were going to be. You know it is that feeling sometimes you get whenever it is like, *'Is there another present under the Christmas tree this year? Isn't there a little bit more?'*

Seriously when we get that baby in our arms for the first time and we are looking into their little baby blue eyes while they are cooing and smiling up at us, we don't ever envision the day when they paint their bedroom walls with excrement. (Laughter.) Or we don't envision they will break something that costs a few thousand dollars, or that they will sneak out in our car without permission and run it into a tree. You know the things that teenagers sometimes do; we don't envision that when you are holding that cute little bundle of joy.

When you say 'I do' and you look in her eyes and say 'forever more,' you don't envision the day whenever you have that knock down argument. Or you are sleeping in the bed fighting over the covers, and you roll over and there is your 'forever more.' Maybe you are wondering, *'How do I know that, Pastor Dan?'* Somebody must have told me that. (Laughter.)

So those things happen. You don't envision the day when your husband or your wife becomes seriously ill and you become their caretaker. Or the day when tragedy comes and you bury someone you love; sometimes it is a child. Now you are probably

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thinking, ‘*Wow Dan, aren’t you Mr. Optimist this morning.*’ But no, this is life. This is living in a broken world, and we eventually get to that point where we do look back and we say, ‘*Lord, was this worth it? Was there meaning here?*’ So here we have Preacher Solomon and he is reflecting out loud. He knows that we will all eventually ask the question, ‘*Is this really all there is to life?*’ Or we will find ourselves saying, ‘*Wow, that went by quickly.*’

So Solomon gives us these words of wisdom. We are looking at the first eleven verses of Ecclesiastes this morning. And we all heard the words read by someone this morning. Did you ever notice people with British and Scottish accents just sound smarter than the rest of the world? Have you ever noticed that? My heritage is completely British and Scottish and so forth, but I apparently lost the accent about three hundred years ago. I wish I could pick it back up just so I could sound smart like those people.

The first line that the Preacher said was, “***Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities. All is vanity.***” Well good morning to you as well. But what I want to do before we are finished this morning, as we have kind of laid this groundwork, is I want to give you some things to contemplate real quickly. I want to give you four bitter truths that kind of get us started, but I also want to give you four joyful hopes that I hope will encourage you. And that is kind of going to be the way it goes; that is why we call this series, ‘Tragic Hope.’

Every coin has two sides. There is day and there is night. There is hot and there is cold. There is good and there is bad. And you would never know what is good if it weren’t for the existence of bad. You would never know what light is if there wasn’t dark to compare to it. You wouldn’t know a straight stick unless you have seen a crooked stick as C. S. Lewis taught us. Or actually he said a crooked stick as opposed to a straight stick. Someone would probably write me an email and correct me on that and I do know that quote. And we have to have this flip side to understand it.

So let me give you the four bitter truths. Here is number one - much of what we focus on in life will eventually leave us feeling unfulfilled. So we need to understand that. And we need to be real about it. How many of you would say, ‘*When I see a glass that is fifty percent filled with a liquid, I look at it and say, ‘Wow, that glass is half full?’* How many of you are like that? Well, you are optimists and I love you folks. You are crazy, but I love you. How many of you when you look at that glass would say, ‘*Why didn’t they fill it all the way to the top?’* And that is me, right here.

People like to call us pessimists. I prefer to call myself a realist. (*Amen.*) To me it is the reality. It could have been filled to the top, but it wasn’t. If they had filled it to the top we wouldn’t be having this conversation, right? So that is the way I look at it.

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Others say, ‘*Oh look at all the potential in that glass.*’ And I am like, ‘*Why didn’t you do it right the first time?*’ I have these big conversations in my head and it is very disturbing. I can’t even walk by a glass of water that is half empty without having a big philosophical meltdown. (*Laughter.*)

But the reality is what we focus on in life will eventually make most of us say, ‘*That wasn’t all I thought it was going to be.*’ We don’t have time to do this today, but if we were to break down word for word these first eleven verses, we would realize that this is poetry. And that last song that was sung this morning was written by somebody at Life Fellowship out of this book of Ecclesiastes. And by the way on Friday night there will be a concert of more music that was written by some of our Worship Team, and I hope you will come be a part of that. And this passage inspired that song.

In verse 2 the message is life goes by fast and then it leaves you feeling empty. Verse 3 the message is you can work hard and sometimes still not feel fulfilled. Verse 4 the message is old age and having children is not even a guarantee that you will feel fulfilled at the end of your life. Verses 5 and 6 the message is we have no control over our life and its seasons as they come and go. And they come and go whether or not we are ready for them to come and go; it is just going to happen. Verse 7 the message is lasting satisfaction is not going to be found in this life. Verse 8 the message is you are not going to be satisfied by experiences. Verses 9 and 10 the message is there is nothing new under the sun. So don’t be looking and searching for the next new thrill. And verse 11 says that what we think is significant in this life really isn’t.

So you look at all these things and these are bitter truths. I don’t want to think about that even if I am a realist. I still need hope. We all need that hope. But in order to appreciate the hope we have to look at the realities. And the reality is this - much of what we think in our life is going to fulfil us is chasing the wrong things. So when we understand that it will help us process the disappointment, the disillusionment and the emptiness we have.

Here is the second truth - we will likely come to question the significance of life in general and our life specifically. Here is where I want us to do a real quick word study, and it is the word ‘*hebel.*’ That is the Hebrew word that is translated in this passage as ‘vanity.’ So when you see the words ‘vanity, vanity, all is vanity.’ It is saying, *hebel, hebel, all is hebel.*’ Maybe you are wondering why that is important. It is because the word *hebel* in the Hebrew is translated in multiple ways. Hebrew is a very, very rich language and sometimes it depends on how you use it, and sometimes we English speakers don’t understand the richness and the depth of it. And here is where a lot of

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scholars have come down; it would be better translated when we see the word 'vanity' if we used the word 'vapor.'

And the reason is this - while vanity kind of gives us the connotation, the denotation of the word is this - remember the haze that kind of floats across the audience, where is it now? It is gone. It was there for a while, but now it is gone. How many of you picked some of it up and put it in your pocket? No, you didn't do that, did you? You can't put it in a jar; it will dissipate. It is not capable of being grasped. You can't transfer it. You can't contain it. It is *hebel*, and that is our life. There for a moment and then it is gone. You think you have control over it, but you don't. You don't get to dictate how many days you have. And while you may try to manipulate it, eventually it will always have its way.

There are three ways that the word *hebel* can be used: vaporous, like breath or breathing; meaningless or empty is another way that it can be used; or futile, like what is the use. So here is the thing we need to remember - part of the human existence, part of just simply living life is there is going to come times in our lives where we ask, '*Is it worth it? Is it worth working this hard? Is it worth being a person of faith? Is it worth investing in my family? Is it worth doing ministry? Is it worth getting up in the morning? Is it worth exercising and eating right?*'

Whatever it is in your life that you think has value as you are doing it, there is likely going to be a time where you may ask, '*Is it worth it?*' Maybe you think, '*Yes, but I have three degrees.*' Will it be worth it at the end of your life when you die alone? Maybe you think, '*Yeah, but I have lots of money.*' Will it be worth it at the end of your life when the doctor says, '*I don't care how much money you have, you are at the end of the road.*' Is it worth it when you spend your whole life working for a company and the day comes when you hit that age where you have to retire and they say, '*Thank you very much,*' and they begin fighting over who gets your office. So we ask ourselves, '*Is it worth it?*' Those things are going to happen and we need to be prepared for those moments. We better have a biblical perspective and an eternal perspective when we approach those.

Here is a third thing - life can seem capricious and chaotic. As we listened to this passage, and as we go through the book of Ecclesiastes we will find that life is short, life is elusive, and life is repetitive. It goes over and over in seasons. None of us asked to be born, we didn't choose our basic conditions of whether we were male or female, what race we were, what nationality, what location, what heritage or how tall we were to become. All those things were not in our control. Often when I travel the world I am struck with my undeserved privileges and blessings. And I do feel some guilt.

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We were in Africa last year and we traveled for miles seeing people living in plywood shacks. And I was thinking that I wouldn't even want to camp in one of those while that is their entire existence for their entire lives. How is it that God let me be born where I was born and they had to be born where they were born? That isn't fair; it doesn't seem right. And in those moments life, and yes even God, can seem capricious. When we see the problems around the world and the hunger and the famine and the wars, you have chaotic as well.

And then you add to that the things we do out of impulse, or in order to survive, like work, eating, drinking, relationships, sleeping, creating, designing and learning, and eventually we can feel like bugs that are just scurrying back and forth with a sense of intentionality, but in the end we have no grasp of the whys, or the where's, or how long it is going to last, or what happens next. And we have to realize that. If you have those feelings you are not losing your mind, you are being human, and you are probably thinking deeply.

The last thing is this - there is no way to escape the great equalizer, and that is death. The Bible says, "***It is appointed unto men once to die.***" And after that we are going to be judged, we are going to stand before God and we are going to give account. In the end we all get tucked into a box, or an urn, or at least a hole, right? And we leave this spot that immediately begins closing in as others assume our roles. Time fades the memories of those who knew us, someone else takes our office, they move into our homes, and they sell our possessions in the driveway for ten cents on the dollar. And if we manage to achieve a rank, or a sufficient value where someone thinks our memory should be memorialized in some way, they might on occasion erect a statue in our memory. Upon which time pigeons will come and defecate on us. (*Laughter.*) That's it. And there may be another generation will come and tear us down. That is a real possibility as well because that is what is happening.

In the end we are all going to die, and death reduces every human to a fleeting memory at best, and even then those who do remember that we lived are incapable of imparting to us at that point any appreciation or any value to us because we are dead. And we really won't care at that point. Look at 2020 - Kobe Bryant, Eddie Van Halen, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Regis Philbin, Congressman John Lewis, great baseball players Bob Gibson and Lou Brock, Little Richard, and Kenny Rogers - all dead just this year.

And we will be doing a funeral in this church sometime in the next twelve months for someone who is either watching at home, or sitting in this room, who never dreamed that at some point in the next twelve months it was going to be their turn. Again, welcome to Life Fellowship where you will get encouraged and cheered up. (*Laughter.*)

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Our world tells us constantly that this is as good as it gets; what we can conceive you can achieve; you matter; this is your best life now; name it and claim it; you have value and worth; you can become whatever you want to become, and it is just simply not true. None of it is true. Even if you do achieve some level of temporary fame or success you are still going to leave it behind. So here is where Solomon was, here is where some of us get, so what do we do with that?

Real quickly, here is what we do. Number one - we adjust our focus and find purpose and fulfillment in the right things. We adjust our focus and we find fulfillment and purpose in the right things. God wants us to enjoy our life. If you will go outside as you leave today there is a commemorative cornerstone and it has a verse from the book of John Chapter 10 on it. And it is the verse upon which this church was founded: ***“That they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*** Abundant - overflowing life. In other words God did not give you this life, or the life to come, so that you have to endure it, but so that you enjoy it. And when your destination for the life to come is set, it reframes this life in a whole new perspective that is filled with and built on hope.

Our present life can be enjoyed in light of our future because this right here is not all that there is, there is hope. And Solomon at the end of the day knows that, and will emphasize that, but to really appreciate the power of that hope we need to understand the desperateness that comes when you don't have that hope.

So here is the second thing - viewing God correctly helps us to find meaning in our lives. God does not exist for our pleasure; we exist for His pleasure. God did not create us so that we can enjoy ourselves; God created us so that we can enjoy Him. And when we think we find pleasure and joy in these things rather than Him, we will feel dried up and pessimistic and empty and futile, vaporous even.

So the person who walks around in despair this morning is the person who may have forgotten who God is, what He has done, what He has promised and the hope we have in Him. So even Solomon in his moments of despair felt like: *‘I have spent my whole life at the top of the world, I am the smartest man around, look at all these women I have around me, look at all the wealth I have, look at all the power I have, people bow before me, but I still feel empty.’* It was because at that moment he forgot there was someone greater upon whom he should be focused. And when you and I get in that situation I guarantee you if you will lift Him up, your heart will be changed.

The third thing is this - God has designed our life with rhythms and phases which give us balance and perspective. Everything in our lives has rhythms and phases. The rotation of the earth, the revolution around the sun, the coming and going of the tides, the changing of the seasons, the phases of life, the perspectives of experience in art, music,

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science, history and math is all about rhythms, phases, design, order, harmony and energy that ultimately is good for us and glorifies God.

May I offer this as someone who has gone past the halfway point in his life by some time - don't rush the phases and the seasons in your life, but instead savor them. Savor them, savor the moment when that baby is real cute in your arms, and savor the moment when they are driving you nuts. Savor the moment when you are thinking, '*Why did I ever have children? Where are they now? Am I going to have to spend the rest of my life visiting them in prison?*' Savor all of those moments, because there is going to come a day when you are going to look back and you are not going to remember all the negatives; you are going to remember most of the positives, and you are going to wish you had those moments again one more time. You are going to wish you had five more minutes with them.

One of my favorite country songs is sung by a young guy that I can't remember his name, but it is called, 'Five More Minutes.' Every time I hear it I get all teary about it because I would love five more minutes with a few people I have had in my life. By the way, you don't want to rush through phases, and you also don't want to delay them. There is nothing more pathetic than a forty year old guy who acts like he is still twenty. If you are sitting in your mom's basement at forty years of age in your underwear playing video games, something went wrong. (*Laughter.*) And it is a little more than a failure to launch. There is something not pretty about that at all.

Personally I thank God that I have my own hair, because I am a vain guy and I probably would want a toupee if I lost all my hair. And if you are wearing a toupee please forgive me, because yours must be so good that I have never noticed it. But the fact is have you ever seen the guy who looks like he has a dead raccoon on his head and he is trying to act cool. He goes out and gets in his convertible wearing his gold chains. And we just kind of shake our heads and think, '*Dude, you are not pulling it off.*' (*Laughter.*) So whether you are delaying the inevitable or whether you are rushing through it, understand God designed rhythms and seasons and He controls us, so let's embrace and enjoy each one for His glory and our benefit.

The last thing is this - for the children of God physical death is separate from eternal life, and it is simply the start of a new beginning. By the way Solomon knew God, and you may know God but have forgotten this truth, so we need to be reminded of it. When you get to that point where you feel like life is meaningless and there is no hope, and you wish you hadn't been born, and all the different things that come with it; will you just pause here and say, '*But I am a child of God, the best is yet to come.*' There

# FINDING JOY - BITTER TRUTHS

## Tragic Hope Series - Part 1

### Dan Burrell

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is a 2021 ahead and it may be glorious. 2020 may stink, but 2021 has hope because I know who has designed it.

And in that moment when we focus on our joy in Him and not the joy that we try to create around us, we will get a 'reset.' We will get a fresh breath of air. Do you know what can happen? A wind will blow through and all the haze and the vanity will disappear and you will be able to see clearly the hope that lies before us, because the hope that lies before us is the hope that lies within us. That is the personal relationship with our creator. And when we live for Him and not for stuff, when we live for Him and not experiences, when we live for Him above all else, then everything else will seem vain and that will seem sure. And that is our hope.

So I hope you will go home and read this passage again. I hope when you get discouraged, I hope when your pain builds and you are thinking you can't get ahead, I hope when your kids are on your very last nerve, I hope when you are alone on a holiday, I hope whenever depression starts to weigh itself in and you are looking at a bottle that you haven't touched in a long time but you are tempted to open right now, when you feel alone and discouraged, or even if you are in such a crisis where you would say, *'I don't want to live anymore,'* --- wait, wait, wait, remember the words of the Preacher, *"This is all smoke and mirrors, but He is not."*

God is real, He designed us for a purpose and He wants us to fulfil it because the best is yet to come. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes as we conclude this morning. Tragic hope - life is filled with tragedy, but the hope we have in Christ makes it worth it. Do you need to brush yourself off this morning a little bit? Do you need to refocus, do you need to regain some purpose and intent? Have you become so overwhelmed by your circumstances that you forgot some important truths like Solomon did?

That is okay. We all get there. I get there. I got there this week several times. That is why we have the Bible, so we can go back to it. It is our thermostat; it helps us to adjust back to where we need to be. *'Don't give up. Don't quit,'* the Preacher said, *'The best is yet to come.'*

But maybe you do not have a relationship with God. If you do not know Christ as your Savior, if you do not know that when you die you will go to Heaven, the bad news is you are in a bad state; the good news is you don't have to stay there. You can come to the point even this morning where you would say, *'God, I am a mess. I am a sinner. I am broken. I am hurting. I don't even know why I am here. But I know you are there and I want to trust you. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and I want to have a relationship with you. So I repent and ask you to forgive me of my sins. I reject them and my ability to save myself or find joy or happiness in my own abilities and my own*

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*circumstances, and I am just going to lean into you and trust you with 100 percent of who I am and what I have. I am yours.'*

Give yourself to Him and when you do that the Bible says that He will wash away every sin, He will adopt you into His family, He gives you eternal life and He blows away the smoke of emptiness that this world clouds our lives with.

Maybe you have questions and you need to talk to someone about this. I will be out front so come see me after the service. Also right over here on your left there is a table and someone will be there and they will pray with you. If you ask them how to have a relationship with God, they will show you from the Bible what that means. You don't have to become a member of this church and don't bring a check book with you because this is just about having a relationship with God and we want you to have that.

Maybe this morning you are just broken and hurting, you just feel empty and God feels so distant, I want you to know that God cares and we care. Just come and let us pray with you, or you can go out in the lobby where there is a little table and someone will be glad to take you somewhere private and pray with you. Whatever you do don't walk out of here feeling hopeless because the message of the Preacher is this - in the end what really matters is where you stand with God, and He has made that very clear that it is for you and for me.

So let's take this final moment as we sing one more song before we leave and let's make sure that we are walking toward Him with Him as our Father. Let's stand as we pray.

*Father, I pray that this morning that you would use your words to convict and call us out of despair, out of hopelessness, and into the light of hope and opportunity that comes when we find our joy in you first and best and most. Father, I pray that even now we would reflect on that, that we would find meaning and significance and hope. And Father, for those who have struggled, or are struggling, or who need a relationship with you, give them the courage to take that next step of action. Don't let them get in their car until they have nailed down their relationship with you. Father, let us be a church that embraces people where they are and loves them to where they need to be, and to give them the hope of the gospel of Christ wherever they go in the midst of a world that seems to have lost its mind and lost its way. Help us to stand as lighthouses of hope so that others might know the joy that we know as we trust you. For it is in Christ's name I pray. Amen.*

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*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*