

A few weeks ago I was at a party. I know what you're thinking. What sort of a party was it if the Vicar was invited? Anyway I was at this party and met a guy I know a bit and asked the normal kind of questions, "how's work going? Have you got a lot on?" His reply was unusual because he said something to the effect that work was no longer as important to him as it had been instead he was trying to enjoy life more. It didn't take much probing to find out the reason for his change of mind because it was what he really wanted to tell me.

He had had a Kairos moment. Now of course he didn't put it like that but that was what he had had.

Let me just remind us of Kairos moments from lifeshapes.

A Kairos moment is a significant moment in life. Just to suggest a few it might be your first day at a new school, getting married, a new job. However, it can be something smaller like reading a book or meeting a friend. The thing about a Kairos moment is that it causes you to sit up take notice and plan a change in life.

For my friend, I'll call him John, the Kairos moment had been the death of a nephew in Afghanistan. It had raised a number of thoughts in John's mind. He'd come to the conclusion in his words that "heaven must be full of bright young people". But also had made him look at his own life and decide that he needed to grab and enjoy life while he still had it.

In Kairos terms he'd:

Observed - the death of a young man

Reflected - that you never know how much time you have

Discussed - with his wife this situation

Planned - to not work quite so much but instead to enjoy life

Accountable - clearly to his wife but in a sense in talking about it to others he was holding himself accountable to them

Act - he was making this happen.

The event of his nephew's death had been a Kairos moment for John.

I mention this because as we come to the next section on Ecclesiastes I think we could say that the Teacher has had a Kairos moment.

Look at chap 9 with me.

•1. He had observed v2-3

All share a common destiny. He observed that everyone dies whether that person has been good or bad, pure or impure, whether they offered sacrifices or not, v3 "the same destiny overtakes them all". Nothing saves you from death he has observed. Whether you are the best or the most holy person or the worst and most wicked, you will die.

2. He has reflected on this, v1. As he reflects he sees that people don't get what they deserve. God is in control but he was not sure that God was well disposed towards them, not even towards the good person.

3. He discussed it - that is what is happening in vs 4-6. If death comes to all, then the living are better off than the dead. Life he suggests to those who will listen or read is better than death - but only just. The proverb at the end of v4 makes it clear that while he favours life over death it is a bitter preference for, as we have seen, life under the sun is meaningless a chasing after the wind! But still at least the living v5 have some self awareness which the dead don't. And v6 they have some emotions, which the dead don't, even if those emotions are not always good.

He has observed that all die and reflected upon it and tells all who will listen that they are going to die and that is the end of it. As far as he is concerned there is nothing beyond death. So in the light of that

4. He planned v7-10 to make the most of life. In the light of death he planned to seek pleasure, especially v7 to eat and drink. Seize the day - carpe diem! And he suggested that God blessed this attitude. He encouraged people to live with joy - that's the meaning of being clothed with white. They were to put on their best clothes and refresh themselves with oil.

He carries on in v9 with the call to enjoy life with your wife or husband but again the Teacher recognised that even so this is not the solution and presents this enjoyment as but a momentary respite from the tragedy and evil of this present world. Finally in v10, in words very reminiscent from my friend John, he encouraged his listeners to act now. If there was something to do to do it now because who knows what the future may bring. Indeed the future would bring death. Death for him was the end as he says at the end of v10 in death there is no planning knowledge or wisdom. Death was the absolute end.

Now in one sense the Teacher had it right as did my friend John because life should be lived. God has given us life and therefore it is good and we should enjoy life and indeed many of us do. But we should enjoy life not because, as the Teacher saw it, there is nothing else. For the Teacher death was the end there was nothing after death but, and here is the big question, is death the end?

As we have seen the Teacher would say yes.

It is here that we come up against the thinking of our present world because the topic of death is still a big question for people.

Last week I mentioned John Humphrys and his search for answer that led to his book "In God we doubt". In the book he says this, "I was on a bus returning from our week's holiday in Aberystwyth. I hated buses. I was always sick on them. It was while I was hanging over the platform at the back that I discovered mortality. For the first time in my short life I realised that one day I would die. Top of Form

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Top of Form

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Once again the question was: why? What was the point of being born if all there was to look forward to was dying? For the length of that ghastly journey and into the next day, everything seemed completely and utterly pointless. Then the normal service of childhood was resumed and it went away. But it came back. Questions like that always do."

Is death the end? Just type it into Google and you get many answers. Many of them say yes it is the end. Here are a few:

"Death is end, I believe in physics, and death is just the end of your physical life. However you can live even after death by doing all great deeds and helping others and nice works. you can live like this forever in other's hearts."

"I suspect death is the end of it all, but there are only 3 things I do 'know'.

1. I am here today.
2. I will not always be.
3. I don't want to leave yet!"

"Death is the end. It is not the end of ALL but it might as well be. If you don't exist, who cares if anyone else does. But should we be afraid? no! I don't think that I could stay in this place much longer than 90 or so years anyway."

I don't want to say this is the main way people think today but plenty of people do think, with the Teacher, that death is the end.

So is death the end?

Well as we come into the New Testament we hear a resounding no!

1. Jesus promised his followers life after death, or eternal life. Just one example is John 6:40, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Clearly Jesus here is thinking of life beyond the grave and is promising that life to all who believe. It was a constant theme in his teaching as he warned people about hell and offered to them life eternal, a life which begins here and now under the sun but continues in eternity in heaven.

2. Jesus died but rose again. Each gospel gives us the record of the resurrection of Jesus. The preaching of the early church focussed upon that resurrection, so Peter, having healed a lame man in the temple in Acts 3, as he explained what was going on said this, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." Peter and the others who had witnessed Jesus alive after his death had no problems with the idea that death is not the end. Despite great opposition they continued to tell people that Jesus who had died had risen.

3. The rest of the New Testament promises the follower of Jesus life after death. Again just one example and this from Paul in 2 Cor 4:14, "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence." This is the constant message of the NT that there is life after death and that Jesus is the kind of firstfruits. As he was raised so will those who follow him and trust in him.

Death is not the end.

The Teacher says that miserable as this life, make the most of it because this is all there is but God through the writers of the NT says live this life to the full but in everything recognise that there is better to come.

Friends from these thoughts I want to leave us with two points for us to go away and think through and put into practice as God leads us.

1. the certainty of heaven. A question I often ask is, "If you were to die tonight could you be sure you would go to heaven?" If there is life after death then can I be sure that I will be in heaven with Jesus? Do you know you will be there? The second question that I ask with the first is, "if you were to die tonight and stand before God and he were to say why should I let you into my heaven what would you say?" Our answer to that is the key to the answer to the first question.

In July 2002 some Pennsylvania coal miners were trapped in a coal mine. When they got out one miner related a conversation between himself and another trapped miner. This young miner said that he asked an older veteran during the ordeal, "Will I go to heaven. . . cause I know the Bible says you've got to be baptized to go to heaven, and I haven't been baptized." His co-worker and friend, in an attempt to comfort the concerned man, responded, "All good people go to heaven," and then he stressed, ". . . no matter what."

That is very common thinking that if you are good you go to heaven. But friend if you offer that as your answer to the second question then I have to tell you, you have it wrong. The answer to the second question is because of what Christ has done for me in dying on the cross. It is only through the death of Jesus on the cross that we can have any hope of eternal life. And it is in the light of that the answer to the first question is yes. That is what God wants for each of us to know that there is life after death and that in Jesus the way to

heaven is open to us. The certainty of heaven

2. Living in the light of eternity

I wonder how many of you here find that work will keep you away from home for one or more nights a week? So you find yourself living out of a suitcase living an odd life, here and yet not here as it were. The Bible suggests that if we are followers of Christ then as it were we have a foot in two camps or we are citizens of two kingdoms, earth and heaven. There you are in your hotel room longing to be home and Paul tells us that he was here on earth longing to be at home in heaven.

Paul expresses this for us in Phil 1:21-23, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Here is the recognition of living with a foot in two worlds under the sun and in heaven. I'm always stunned by those words at the end of v23, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Is that how you feel, Mr Christian or Mrs Christian? When you wake up in the morning do you leap out of bed and say it is a great morning but I'd rather be dead and with the Lord? Well perhaps you do if life is very hard and things are very bad but for most of us we are too busy following the advice of the teacher and making most of life under the sun for heaven to be an attractive proposition. I am just the same I enjoy life here and now and want heaven to wait. I want to continue to see my family grow up, to play cricket to see Kettering in the premiership then perhaps I'm ready for heaven. Paul's words are a huge challenge and raise questions about my relationship to Jesus and my understanding of heaven.

If we are followers of Christ we are called in everything to put him first, to seek first the kingdom of God.

So, if we are thinking about our work, while the Teacher tells his readers, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might," (Eccles 9:10) Paul tells his readers, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord," (Col3:23).

In our relationships the Teacher will tell the reader, "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life," (Eccles 9:9) while again Paul tells his readers, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," (Eph 5:25) Can you see the difference the Christ dimension makes and that we live in the light of heaven.

Finally the Teacher told his readers in effect to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die, "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favours what you do," (Eccles 9:7). Whereas in the parable Jesus called the rich man with this philosophy a fool and said, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). Not storing up things on earth but storing up treasure in heaven. Living today in the light of eternity.

Is death the end? No it is not the Bible makes it clear. Through Jesus we can know the certainty of heaven and of eternal life and knowing that certainty we are called to live not under the sun but under heaven.