

Proper 13



Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, judge of us all, you have placed in our hands the wealth we call our own. Give us such wisdom by your Spirit that our possessions may not be a curse in our lives, but an instrument for blessing; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

{2} Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.... {12} I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, {13} applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. {14} I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.... {2:18} I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me {19} --and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. {20} So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, {21} because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. {22} What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? {23} For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

2. *vanity*: "*hebel* denotes a breath, empty of substance and also transient. The writer's thesis is that everything in man's experience of life in this world ('under the sun [passim]) is empty of meaning or worth, both in itself and because of its transience. Hence all man's restless activities, his efforts to achieve something, are ultimately futile.... Qoheleth goes on to consider the ethical question of how men should live in a world where all experiences are fleeting and all effort without permanent result" [1]

12. *I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem...applied my mind to...wisdom*: "The author now assumes the role of a Solomon, not only because that king was the legendary exemplar of true wisdom, but because 'a king...can do as he pleases' (viii 2-3; cf. ii 12) and hence is free from the inhibitions and obstacles that beset ordinary men in their search for wisdom. The conclusion is reached that man is destined by God to ceaseless effort without result, since the setting of his life cannot be altered. Even the quest for understanding is futile." [2] Traditionally, Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes.

2:18-24: "Not only does death treat alike the wise man and the fool; it cancels the lasting value of the wise man's achievement, because a fool may be the one to profit by what the wise man leaves behind." [3]

Psalms 49:1-12

{1} Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, {2} both low and high, rich and poor together. {3} My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. {4} I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp. {5} Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, {6} those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? {7} Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. {8} For the ransom of life is costly,

and can never suffice {9} that one should live on forever and never see the grave. {10} When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others. {11} Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own. {12} Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.

1-4: "The author inclines his ear to the other world in order to receive the determinative statement with which he can alarm the rich and comfort the poor." [4]

my riddle: The author will provide a solution to the riddle of why (s)he is not afraid of his enemies.

to the music of the harp: See 2 Kings 3:15 for the use of music as a channel for divine inspiration.

5-12: The singer indicates that he is facing wealthy adversaries, but he is not afraid. Death comes to all, there is no escape from it. Mortals, even the wise, perish like animals.

[15-20: The rich can take nothing with them when they die. Yahweh redeems the unjustly persecuted. This is the solution to the riddle.]

Colossians 3:1-11

{1} So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. {2} Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, {3} for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. {4} When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. {5} Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). {6} On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. {7} These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. {8} But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. {9} Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices {10} and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. {11} In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

The new self is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. What Eve and Adam sought, but could not attain by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, is given freely by God to those who have been raised with Christ.

5. *Put to death...whatever in you is earthly*: Romans 6:11: "...you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." The catalog of vices includes sexual sins, especially revolting to the Jews and greed (literally, "covetousness").

8-9. *get rid of all such things*: Another catalog of vices which includes those things that "poison and destroy the relationships between men." [5]

11. *In that renewal*: There is no distinction between race or class in God's new order. In Galatians 3:28 gender distinctions also disappear.

Luke 12:13-21

{13} Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." {14} But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" {15} And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." {16} Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. {17} And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' {18} Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. {19} And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' {20} But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared,

whose will they be?' {21} So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

13. tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me: Rivalry between family members over inheritance is common in all cultures. And so is the ideal of family unity expressed in Psalm 133:1, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!"

14. who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you: Jesus refused to take sides in a dispute over the family inheritance. Moses tried to settle a dispute between two Hebrew slaves (Exodus 2:13 f.). One of them asked, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?"

15. one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions: In Hebrew culture one ought to live from one's work, not from one's assets. If one's possessions exceed one's needs they ought to be used for the poor. In doing so one "lays up treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33).

16-20: See Sirach 11:18-20 for a similar story. The situation of the rich man would have stood in stark contrast to the situation of many Israelites, especially those who were attracted by Jesus' message.

20. God said to him, "You fool!...": "The stereotype of the rich man as insatiably greedy reflects the ancient notion of limited good: the pie is finite, is already fully distributed, and cannot be expanded. Therefore if anyone's share got larger, someone else's automatically got smaller.... Anyone with a surplus would normally feel shame unless he gave liberally to clients or the community. By keeping everything to himself and refusing to act as a generous patron, the rich man in the parable reveals himself as a dishonorable fool." [6] Unfortunately, the rich man's foolishness can also ensnare his heirs in his greed. Which returns us to the beginning of the pericope with brothers in conflict over their inheritance.

21: The contrast between those "who store up treasures for themselves" and those who are "rich toward God" is absolute. "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13).

Reflection

In the prayer we ask that we may use our wealth for a blessing and not as a curse. The first lesson probes the notion that all human life is a "chasing after wind" (1:14).

Ecclesiastes declares the foolishness of placing value on possessions or property. Work is necessary—one should find enjoyment in their toil, though it is often a burden—but not the result of work—that must be left to the one who comes after, and they may be fools. The vanity of the world is a consolation for the Psalmist because (s)he knows that his/her wealthy adversaries will perish, while Yahweh will redeem the righteous poor.

The parable in the Gospel was addressed to the rich, those who had more than they needed to live from day to day. "Failure to give from their surplus is precisely what is criticized in the parable of 12:16-21." [7] If we live in such a way that we accumulate assets beyond our needs, then we stand under the judgment of Jesus' parable.

Those who have been raised with Christ are to concern themselves with matters of heaven rather than earth. The believer has "died" (in baptism, Romans 6:1ff) to sin, (s)he now lives in Christ. What is now true will be revealed in the Parousia "in which the veil will be drawn back so that whatever is veiled from our eyes shines in bright light." [8]

Human distinctions have no meaning for God, and they cease to have meaning for

those who, in baptism, have been renewed in the image of the Creator.

The human search for wisdom began in the garden when Eve and Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it "to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6). Human wisdom ends in despair. True wisdom is found in the foolishness of the Cross, "for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Hymns [\[9\]](#)

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

750s --E--O Holy Spirit,
511 --E--Renew Me, O
364 --D--Son of God,
373 --II--Eternal Ruler of

767s --II--Now Let Us
447 --G--All Depends on
782v --G--All My Hope
415, 537, 353, 359

Prayers of the People [\[10\]](#)

P or A: Beyond racial, cultural, and linguistic barriers, all who are baptized are called to be one in Christ. In this spirit of unity, we pray in Jesus' name and respond together, "Amen."

A: For protection against the forces of evil, that we may seek your guiding light to lead us out of the blinding darkness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For the unity of your people--a togetherness transcending colour, language and culture--for in you there is neither male nor female, Greek nor Jew, slave nor free. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For the deliverance of the hungry and the thirsty from their want, that their lack may be turned into abundance. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For the sick and the dying, that they may find comfort in you and in our prayers for them. Especially do we remember _____, and those whom we name in our hearts... In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For those who store up for themselves earthly riches which shall perish, that they might instead seek to possess the fruit of the spirit which endures. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

P: One in Christ, we lift our prayers together in his holy name. Amen.

Or [\[11\]](#)

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God, who knows the needs of every living creature.

Deacon or other leader

For *N* our bishop and *N* our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For the leaders of the nations, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For farmers and a good harvest, for travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families and companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

All-knowing God, God of Wisdom, hear our prayers for all whose days are full of pain and give us rest from toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

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[1] R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, p. 209.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 482.

[5] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 140.

[6] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 359.

[7] *Loc. cit.*

[8] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p.134.

[9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[10] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[11] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>