

## VOC - March 2015: *Ecclesiastes*

### 4. The quest for hope

*Dear Listeners,*

So far this month, with the *Preacher*, the author of that fascinating book *Ecclesiastes*, we have looked around in this world and in the lives of the people. On the one hand we have come to see the *vanities*, the futilities, the mortality, in man's life, and we came to *conclusions* that were similar as the Preacher's: everything stays the same, it's tiring, and it seems hopeless. Yet, we have noted with deep gratitude as well how the Preacher is holding up these realities in order to make us *look up to the One who is above the sun, God*, who has the whole world in His hand, and who has *a plan*, which He works out in history. In this plan He gave *Jesus Christ* at the centre of history and places Him in the *centre of our life* as well, so that we may learn to look at life through *His* wisdom, and receive *His* grace and goodness! Hence, there is *purpose* again in life, and He overcame the vanities in *labour*, and He is holding up a promising future too!

Indeed, dear listener, that's our *focal point* today: the quest for *hope*, for a *future*! It is for good reason that the author of the book of *Ecclesiastes* presents himself as "the Preacher." He is a teacher of *wisdom*, a preacher of *grace*, and a man who serves God, who by God's Holy Spirit shows his audience, including listeners like you and me, that there is a future for this world. In chapter 11 of his book the Preacher starts out with a somewhat obscure expression, when he says, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again." In this *metaphor* he compares 'bread' with our *life*, with the *sources* for our life, with the *ways* in which we make a living. He exhorts his listeners to *work* with the gifts, the means, and with the opportunities God gives in this world. We have seen and heard this exhortation before in this book: go to work, *in the Lord* your labour is not in vain! Then the Preacher realizes that this comes with *risks*, but go at it with all your might and take courage, for the *outcome* will show in due time.

Already in taking this approach, dear listeners, you will give your life and labour a future! The Preacher, however, doesn't mean to say that you should go about it *recklessly*; rather, don't put all your eggs in one basket he adds, but look for opportunities in *different* places: "Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land." In the midst of this broken world and in the sight of many a break-down, even disaster, that could happen in it; you must be prepared for what may come your way. You cannot *foresee* harm or hurt or predict the way the market will develop; it may not result in *apathy* or *fatalism*. Why not? Well, you're not dealing with *fate* or *fortune* but with God, who has a *plan* with this world. "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the *Maker* of all things." We don't know what *tomorrow* will bring, nor do we know the *future* of our life or this world; still, *this* we know: God has made it all, and *He rules*, yes He does so, *not by chance*, but by His Fatherly hand, according to His *plan*!

The Preacher, dear listeners, calls his audience, you and me also, to a life in *faith* and *trust* in God. He has a plan, and for the OT people of God the *coming* of the *Messiah* was central to this plan and to the fulfilment of all God's promises. Then it could well be that the history of His people develops along lines of troubles and struggles, through times of death and darkness; yet, it's *not* some obscure power who is pulling the strings, it is God who made everything and who still holds everything in His hand! He *fulfilled* His *promise* of sending the Messiah, the Saviour, who came to restore us and reconcile us with God, so that life isn't senseless and futile any longer. We *now* may look forward to His second coming! Of whom? We expect Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given *all power* and authority in heaven and on earth, *for His church*! Then we may wonder and think at times: what can we see of it? What is He *doing* with this world and where is His power in the lives of His people, you wonder? Yet, *by faith* we know that just as God fulfilled the promise of His coming into the flesh in Jesus Christ, so He will fulfil the promise of His *second coming*! That's why we can move on in life, and take up our labours with all its risks, for there is *hope*, a *future* for this world!

What an *encouraging* message this is, dear listeners! Indeed, the Preacher continues his lesson and includes the youth among his audience especially. Thanks to this rich prospect and perspective for this world, there is *hope* for everyone who believes, *also* for the youth in our time. "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth." Time flies, the Preacher adds, so make the most of the spring time of your life and use the opportunities that present themselves! You see, that's how the expectation and anticipation of the return of Christ becomes an *incentive* in life and gives a future to the *youth* of today! That's how the quest for *wisdom*, for *grace*, and for *life*, the way we have seen it so far this month, gives a sense and purpose to life, for Christ's sake! It also shows how important it is for the *youth* of our days to come to *church* and hear this message of life and salvation proclaimed there! Its message sheds a wonderful light over your life, the Preacher tells us. That's the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified; He *is* the light of this world!

Then the Preacher *concludes* this message, showing us the *importance* and *seriousness* of it: with the coming of Christ God will also bring us to *judgment*. No, that's *not* mentioned to put a *dampener* on an otherwise uplifting and encouraging message. Just the fact alone that the Preacher makes us aware of it and *prepares* us for it already is a real blessing! Indeed, the fact that we can hear such preaching every Sunday *in the church* of Christ means that we are encouraged and enriched every Sunday; it also shows us the way of life, of grace, and of salvation in Jesus Christ! That's how God, by His Holy Spirit and Word, works faith, faith in Jesus Christ. By *faith in Him* we can entrust ourselves to God's Fatherly care in the midst of this broken world; and by faith in Him you will also see in the judgment of God that your life was *not* lived in vain! Thus we may stand in this world by faith and believe that there is hope, that there is a future for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ! Thank you for listening!