

## **WELCOME 21<sup>st</sup> September 2025 – 15 Pentecost '25 C**

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 & 1 Peter 2:4-10

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again...As always...along w/ your worship order you have **Bible Study Qs & Growing Praise** inserts that over the week lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & then out to share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups; Friday @ 1pm.**

**As we move into this week...** **We** all have questions. Some are easy to answer. "What's for dinner?" "Does this dress make my butt look big?" Some are more difficult – "Does my life have purpose?" "Why does God allow suffering & evil?" "Does God even exist?"

If you're part of the human race...sooner or later you ask fundamental questions of existence...meaning...purpose...Why are we here? Is this life all there is? Why does bad stuff happen? When life hurts is there any help? Is my life important...at all?

What we say as God's people when those around us are asking those questions matters? We'll likely never "talk" someone into believing in Jesus, but we can offer a reason for the hope w/in us & for the joy we experience even in difficult times and especially for persistent tenacious faith when all around us screams "doubt!"

We'll spend the next few weeks listening to the questions people ask the great internet search engines, and discovering what our response could be to some of the world's most "searched" questions about, God, life, & Christian faith...

There's an old saying, **"If** you aim at nothing you're bound to hit it." Absolutely true. But God is clear this life isn't about aimless random wandering...flitting from one thing to another...living adrift at sea w/ no sails - rudder – compass. **But** you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation; God's very own possession; so that you may proclaim the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

**Our** purpose is to live as who God says we are.

Let's pray together & then dive into God's word & our world's questions today...

## **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Heavenly Father, in your Son Jesus, we are more than conquerors over hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril & sword. Protect us from the evil one. Give us your authority & your power to withstand the forces of evil at work in our lives & in our world. By your Spirit in us advance the work of your kingdom against this world's darkness; bringing life, light, hope, love, peace & security. Let it be so today for your glory & our witness to the world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen!*

*Let's hear God's Word...*

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. Have you ever tried to "convince" someone to become a follower of Jesus? Did you succeed? What might have worked more effectively?
2. What do you think encourages most people to become followers of Jesus?

## 15 PENTECOST '25 C – SINCE YOU ASKED: DOES LIFE HAVE A PURPOSE

The late Pr Tim Keller from NYC once noted in his writing on the book of Ecclesiastes...that Ecclesiastes reads like a truth/dare party game. Someone said, "I dare you to live like there is no God" & the writer said, "Ok...I'll give it a go." So the Ecclesiastic/Solomon lived in pursuit of all manner of things except God. Look how he describes his pursuit of meaning purpose satisfaction contentment in the absence of God...as if God isn't there.

*I devoted myself to search for understanding & to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. - Eccl 1:13 – I tried to figure out life find satisfaction purpose meaning by sheer force of intellect...understand life's mysteries & intricacies...but he soon abandons that...So...I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom & knowledge than any of them." So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness & folly. – Eccl 1:16-17 Wisdom understanding grappling w/ life's mysteries didn't produce heartfelt contentment...so I looked elsewhere...But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow. – Eccl 2:16-18 The more I learned about the world & about people the greater the heartache...trying to laugh it all off...just as empty. (next 3 same slide)*

So far...he's empty-handed...I tried wisdom...understand or make it all a joke. It all proved fruitless...chasing the wind...So, I said to myself, "Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the 'good things' in life." – Eccl 2:1 After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine... – Eccl 2:3 When in doubt, throw a party...launch yourself into every pleasure you can...delight yourself in yourself. Spoil yourself. You deserve a break today...Celebrate you! Take pride in you! That's what he did & the results were the same...But I found that this, too, was meaningless. What about serious pursuits?

*I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself & by planting beautiful vineyards...I collected great sums of silver & gold, the treasure of many kings & provinces...I had everything a man could desire! – Eccl 2:4-8 I worked hard & accomplished much & accumulated more. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. - Eccl 2:9 I enjoyed what I was doing...that should have spelled meaning purpose contentment...he's a guy who's grabbed life by the shirt-collar & shaken every last \$\$\$ out of it...But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. – Eccl 2:11 When everything looks like roses but smells like sheering shed toilet in Summer...So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind. - Eccl 2:17 But why? 2 things...*

1<sup>st</sup> - *For the wise & the foolish both die. The wise will not be remembered any longer than the fool. In the days to come, both will be forgotten. – Eccl 2:16* Death calls into question all human striving, accomplishments, achievements. Wise/foolish. Rich/poor. Hard @ work/Work-shy & bone idle. You die, are forgotten & all your stuff ends up in someone else's hands & they might squander all you've worked to build. Death & the louts who inherit your stuff. But 2<sup>nd</sup>...something even more gripping...Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. God has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. – Eccl 3:11 Every soul on this planet has a pull on their heart toward something bigger & more beautiful than the most majestic experience on earth can provide. We sense life means something...life matters...& there's more than our small existence can offer. We instinctively get it that we are made for more than toil, trouble & a 6x6x3 hole at the end of it all.

*So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food & drink & to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him? – Eccl 2:24-25* Can you live like there is no God? I did & found life had nothing to offer apart from him because he gives all things. His hands are on every part of life...good, bad, blessed or sad. All of it's tied to Him. So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy & enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat & drink & enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. – Eccl 3:12 Can you live like life is meaningless...purposeless...random? The late anti-theist Christopher Hitchens said; "It could be that all existence is a pointless joke, but it is not in fact possible to live one's everyday life as if this were so." Even someone rabidly anti-God knows...we can't exist as if our lives are random bits of matter spun into a great cosmic swamp w/ no intention or purpose, desire or design.

So when Peter writes to followers of Jesus scattered across the Roman Empire in what would now be parts of Turkey...folks who are being horribly persecuted for their faith...blamed for everything wrong in the Empire & driven into hiding in many places...who live in a world that not just scoffs at & mocks their faith as foolishness but is happy to see Xns die for their trust in Christ & their rejection of the values attitudes aspirations & attachments of the world. Peter starts from the place of what anchors our lives: our identity in Christ & our destiny w/ Christ: All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again into a living, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance kept in heaven for you, pure & undefiled, beyond the reach of change & decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.—1 Pet 1:3-5

OT/NT agree...every fibre of all creation is designed to enjoy life w/ God...to live responsive to – responding to – rejoicing in God’s presence. **We** are built at a level deeper than our DNA to live in & delight in God’s presence. Too often we make life’s “meaning/purpose” something we create out of what we do...& if we do it to the applause of the masses, our lives mean more than some poor schmoe who just grows tomatoes & or who minds their grandkids. “You were made by God & for God & until you understand that, life will never make sense.” – Rick Warren

The crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus Christ anchor our lives, hopes, future, destiny & legacy in him...At one point Jn 15:5 Jesus says to his disciples & he’s talking to you & me... *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, & I in them, produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”* Of first importance - our “purpose” is to stay grafted into Jesus...the essence of discipleship...being so unbreakably linked to Jesus through worship, prayer, study of his Word, serving among his people, obedience to what he has told us to do...so unbreakably linked to Jesus that his way of being in the world becomes ours...our lives become like his...we “branches” become everything the “vine” is. Apart from Jesus we got nothing...useless branches ...withers gathered & burned...scary stuff. When our lives are linked to his...hooked into him...anything becomes possible. And then crucially: **...for** *you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession; so that you may proclaim the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

As we live in the power of Jesus’ resurrection – as we live in the joy of his forgiveness – as we live in the hope of his eternal life – as we live in the strength of his Holy Spirit...his church flourishes...gets stronger...more loving...more generous ...more vibrant....Jesus assumes a flourishing capacity & drive among his people... that we will live w/ our arms & hearts wide open to gather the world to the foot of the cross w/ us...for hope, for healing, for life, for peace...for rejoicing & delighting in God’s presence. Life’s purpose, meaning, satisfaction, contentment, & fulfillment remains what it has been since Jesus walked on this earth & stepped out of the grave: To walk so closely so responsively so obediently in step w/ Jesus that his life his love his power his grace & his mercy pour out in every word every deed every day.

God is clear this life isn’t about aimless random wandering...flitting from one thing to another...living adrift at sea w/ no sails - rudder – compass. Jesus has written you into his story of eternal life & unfailing love & abundant joy; you can trust that Jesus’ purpose from cradle to cross to risen & ruling over all things...is to bless & heal...to comfort & restore...to raise up & make new. He will transform you into his likeness &

make your life his best example of abundant life – unconditional love – extravagant grace - prodigal forgiveness unreasonable generosity, restoration & power beyond every imagination... our mission our purpose remains. To walk so closely so responsively so obediently in step w/ Jesus that his life his love his power his grace & his mercy pour out in every word every deed every day.

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**Our** *purpose is to live as who God says we are.*

*As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...*

#### **TAKE IT HOME**

*Peter describes believers as a “chosen people” and “royal priests.”*

*How might embracing that identity shape the way you approach the opportunities and challenges you face?*

**Let’s pray...***Father in all things you are with us and at all times you are moving us toward your glorious triumph at the end of our days on earth. You have created us to be with you always, to reveal you to those around us and to delight in the abundance of your blessings. Let your Word find its home in our hearts and produce a harvest of righteousness and a bounty of lives blessed for all eternity. in Jesus’ Name we pray --- Amen*