

## **WHO ARE WE?**

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

Who are we? To an animal that doesn't matter. A dog goes about sniffing this and that. A squirrel dashes up and down trees gathering food. A fish swims in the water without even knowing what water is. But we humans are not satisfied just existing and doing business. We want to know where we came from and where we are going, why we are here,--just exactly who we are!

In the sciences we are told to use "natural" explanations. So scientists the question, "Who are we?" according to what they see in nature. To biologists we are animals that have evolved from other lower forms of animals. We may think that we are special, but that is only from our own perspective. A roach may not do the things we do, but if there ever were a nuclear holocaust, humans could become extinct while roaches would live on. To chemists we are a collection of chemicals that may be more complex than what other animals have, but we are just here by chance. To physicists we are actually like holograms projected into space by 2-D layers of information on the edge of space.

But does that satisfy us? We'd like to think we are more important, more significant than that. Yet listen to what Ecclesiastes says. In the original Hebrew the title of the book is "The Preacher." This is what the "Preacher" says: "As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?" How many of us know the names of our great grandparents? How about the names of their parents? How well will we be remembered by our great-grandchildren? By their children? In light of that who are we?

In Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism you learn to just accept life as it is. You come from the universe and will go back to it. Life and death are just cycles that will go on until you get released from those cycles and are one with the universe forever. So historically in those cultures you just accepted how thousands would die each year from famine, flood, drought, and earthquakes.

In our culture we don't accept death and the seeming senselessness of life, so we tend to ignore death. We keep ourselves busy with life and don't stop to think about it. We contact friends by Facebook and texting, work to earn a decent paycheck, take up hobbies and video games to take up our free time, and enjoy the

things in life. If that is too shallow, then we can get involved in good causes and make good memories with the people in our lives. But still in the end, who are we? You can avoid that question as a busy college student or even a busy working person, or a heavily scheduled, active retiree. But eventually we have to deal with “the Preacher’s” dilemma: “Naked a man comes out from his mother’s womb, and as he comes out, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.”

The “Preacher’s” answer to the problem is to say, “Man seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.”

Does this mean God just keeps us satisfied in this life so we don’t stop to think about who we are and where we are headed? Karl Marx called religion, “the opiate of the masses,” like a drug that keeps people happy so they don’t deal with the truth.

That is hardly the case when we consider where God has left us. God made this world to click, to work just right. But our sin messes things up. God holds in check that sin, which messes things up, and keeps it from destroying this world and us. But still He allows things to be messed up. Why does He do that? So that we are not satisfied with the way things are. We don’t want to die. Death is not something we just ignore. Death is what stares in front of us and says, “Life as you have it is not good. It is messed up. You need another way!”

Blaise Pascal was a great mathematician, but even more a devout Christian. He observed human life and concluded that Christianity must be true because it alone truly emphasized the real human condition. The Bible shows why we got here in the first place and the greatness we have because we are created in God’s image. It is not conceited to see that there is something special about humans, not because we have done anything, but by what God made us to be in creation. Then God’s Word shows us how that greatness got screwed up and corrupted by the fall into sin. God’s Word shows us that so great is that corruption, that our efforts will not fix it. As the “Preacher” says, “As a man comes, so he departs; and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustrations, affliction, and anger.” But most of all in God’s Word we have the only real hope for our human condition—Jesus Christ. When the “Preacher” says, “God gives any man wealth and possessions and another time to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in it—this is a gift from God,” he means that the key is God in our lives. Jesus is God coming to us in our existence as human beings to give meaning

and hope to our lives. There is now a “why” in our lives to answer the question, “Who are we?” God made us to be His people.

And in Jesus we see that what is hopeless and impossible for us humans—to defeat death and hopelessness—is now ours in Him. God made us in the first place—and what we read about what God created in Genesis is, “That God saw it, and it was good.” We can add to that, “Not only did God make us; He died for us. We are really worth something. We are God’s!”

John Newton wrote the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” He had been a slave trader until Christ changed his life. He became dedicated to putting an end to slavery along with his friend, fellow Christian and Member of Parliament, William Wilberforce, who came up with the law that abolished slavery in the British Empire in 1833 and paved the way for abolition in this country.

John Meyer is a former member of this congregation who was critically injured on his bike when a car hit him. His vital organs and brain are okay, but with a severed spine he will probably never walk again. But a few days after the accident as his wife and a nurse were talking to him to assure him, he mentioned the teenage girl whose car hit him and showed concern for her, not himself.

A woman lies in a hospice bed, knowing that she is going to die. But when you see her she smiles, she is at peace because she knows that even death cannot separate her from her Savior.

That is what happens when we see that we belong to God. We have a definite goal and purpose in life—to live for God by loving other people.