

Ecclesiastes 2 & 3

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[0 : 00] and to share God's Word with you. And I want us to look at this book of Ecclesiastes, particularly the verses we've just read, and then going on into the verses we've read before, Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

I'm sure as most of you know, this is a book that is generally referenced, we've been written by Solomon. We accept that because that's also what it says right at the beginning, chapter 1, verse 1, the words of the teacher of the son of David, king of Jerusalem.

It's a strange book in some ways in the Bible, because it says a lot of things that people think, but you wouldn't think would be in the Bible. It is, to my mind, the most relevant book in the whole Bible for the culture that we live in.

And what I mean by that is not to say that others are not relevant, but in terms of a starting point, and describing what our society is at, this is about the best description that you could possibly get. It is a lot tied in with the absolute meaninglessness of life. Let me quote you something from a man called Professor Joseph Wood Crutch, a professor of English at Columbia University.

[1 : 18] He said this, When we first went to Dundee, the manse was decorated, and the local decorator was in, and at some point, there was a spider crawling somewhere, and I can't remember whether it was my wife or myself, but there's one thing to be done with spiders, and that's whack them.

And he was horrified at this. Oh, you can't do that. And wanted to pick it up, and take it, and place it outside. Such a respect for life, that you would think.

Well, there are people who, philosophically, they believe that. They believe that human beings are just animals. Logically, you then have to work on the premise that maybe the way we treat a rat, what's wrong with treating a human being like that?

That was the fundamental view, actually, of Hitler and the Nazis, when they managed to persuade themselves and others that the Jews and the gypsies and the homosexuals were not real human beings, or not of significant value, and could be removed and taken away.

I would argue that, logically, if you want to be reasonable, and you are an absolute materialist evolutionist, by that I mean you're saying that there is nothing else.

[3 : 13] That as one chemistry postgrad said to me, we are just chemicals. Then, ultimately, there's nothing that makes you or I any different from any other animal, or indeed, even from any plants.

A man called Wendell Berry said this. He's talking about life in the United States, but I think it's life that applies here, and he's talked about how it's all gone wrong at the end of the 20th century.

He says, We knew and took for granted marriage without love, sex without joy, drink without conviviality, birth celebration and death without adequate ceremony, faith without doubt or trial, belief without deeds, manners without generosity, such humanizing emotions as pleasure in small, profitless things, joy, wonder, ecstasy, were removed as by an operation on the brain.

What he's saying there is something that's very true for so many people in our culture and in our society, that having been fed and taught that we are, in effect, just animals, people start behaving like that and find it deeply unsatisfying.

In fact, that first two chapters of Ecclesiastes is Solomon saying, I've tried lots of different things, I've tried wine, women, and song, I've tried knowledge, I am not satisfied.

[4 : 37] It is the equivalent of drinking salt water. You're thirsty, but you're not satisfied. It's having a meal, being full, and yet still feeling hungry.

That is life for so many people. And I want to suggest also, I want to ask, I want to ask you this, even those of us who are professing Christians, do we have satisfaction in the sense that Paul talks in Philippians, I have learned the secret of being content, I've learned the secret of being satisfied in

any and every situation.

In Ecclesiastes, when we're faced with that question, of satisfaction and what life is like, the verses we read just there in chapter 2, verse 24 onwards, begin a kind of change.

Because up until chapter 2, verse 24, it's basically a description of life without God. Life with money, yes.

Life with servants, yes. Life with sex, yes. Life with music, yes. Go to chapter 2, verse 10. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired.

[5 : 52] I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work. And this was the reward for all my labor. Life with work. This was somebody who's exploring all these different things and he's leaving God entirely out of the equation.

There's an Italian proverb. He who leaves God out of his reckoning does not know how to count. What the teacher does is he tries all these different things and without God, he says, it is all absolutely and utterly meaningless.

I don't know if you've been, I don't know how you can miss all the fuss about George Best and his death. I find it fascinating that the very media that were prepared to torture him because of his alcoholism and because of his appalling behavior in so many ways, media who sent cameramen to dog every step are now lauding and praising him and the whole nation is to be in mourning over this great and fine man.

Well, I certainly mourn for George Best. I'm very interested in football. I think he was just probably the best footballer that Britain has ever produced. But I can't look upon him as a great man in any sense whatsoever.

I just look at his life and his talent and think, what a waste. How utterly pointless and meaningless. So what if he scored the winning goal in the European Cup final?

[7 : 30] So pointless. The rest of it, he couldn't hold together a relationship. He couldn't cope with the money. He couldn't cope with the fame. He used and abused women. So what?

What point is there in that kind of life? Well, there's an answer that is given. There's no point in anybody's life, no matter who they are, without God.

In chapter 24, in chapter 2 and verse 24 to verse 26, God is brought into the equation. And what's said here, first of all, is this. That life is to be enjoyed.

This is not despair. He's not saying, a man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. In other words, he's not saying, there's no point, all I can do is eat and drink and just enjoy life.

Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. He's not saying that. He's saying the very opposite of that. He's saying, we are actually meant to enjoy the simple things in life. We're meant to enjoy our food.

[8 : 30] We're meant to enjoy drinking. We're meant to enjoy our work. This is not the greed of the rich fool who wants to build bigger and better barns for more and more money.

Nor is it the mundane and hopeless life of the unbeliever. Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. It's not licentiousness. It's not, let's go out on a Friday night and get plastered because hey, we're really going to enjoy ourselves.

Why anyone thinks that getting yourself totally drunk is a sign of enjoyment. I don't grasp. I don't get it. It doesn't make any sense. It is rather contentment.

I have learned to be content. Verse 25, This too I see is from the hand of God for without him who can eat or find enjoyment? The Christian view is you cannot really find contentment in the simple things in life without God.

To eat is used as an indicator here of a happy and a prosperous life. In addition, verse 26, God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy to the person who pleases him. We need all these things.

[9 : 40] According to Ecclesiastes, wisdom is what enables a person to walk without stumbling, give success, preserves life, protects, enables successful work, discriminating judgments and gives strength and joy.

Knowledge is not just the acquisition of facts but it's life experience. Those of you who are at university here, why are you at university? Why have you come to Aberdeen?

What are you hoping to achieve by your studies? Well, sadly, down in Dundee when I speak to students sometimes the answer is I'm going to get a qualification that gets me a good job.

I went to Edinburgh to study history and politics. Not a qualification that was likely to get you a good job. Why bother to go and do something like that?

It's a very old fashioned view of learning. And the idea is simply this, that education in and of itself is a good thing. It's a great thing. It's not just about getting a job or getting a career.

[10:41] it's actually acquiring knowledge. And in an offuse expression, life skills.

Well, that's the Bible's view of knowledge. Knowledge is not just the acquisition of facts, but it's life experience. Joy, he gives happiness here.

Happiness is real, soundly based exaltation in God's blessings. Now that is the life of faith. A life which is lived with God over it all.

You contrast that, or the teacher contrasts that with the sinner. But to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth. To hand it over to the one who pleases God.

The sinner here is the person who does not acknowledge or accept or take his life from the hand of God. When you say, it's my life, I'll do as I please. Again, going back to Mr. Best or to anyone.

[11:44] Sometimes someone famous dies and maybe they've been a kind of wild character in some ways and people will tut tut and moralize about it and so on. But then they'll say, but we could always say he did it his way.

And they think that Frank Sinatra's song is a song, there are people who, there's a recent study done of songs get played at funerals. Everything, bizarrely, from the Birdie song through to apparently one of the most popular is Frank Sinatra's My Way.

I cannot think of a sadder song to play at someone's funeral than I Did It My Way. Because nobody's way will lead to God or to heaven or to happiness.

There's a secular pessimism. A vicious circle of a pointless world. Temporary pleasures, fruitless work, futile wisdom, inevitable death.

That is the life without God. Temporary pleasures, the temporary, fruitless work, futile wisdom, inevitable death, versus the life from the hand of God.

[12:56] There's a series of television adverts for Pepsi, Live Life to the Max. And the idea of living life to the max is that you throw yourself off a mountain and parachute down or something.

You do, extreme sports are very popular. We have a guy down in Dundee who came from the university here who played for Aberdeen University underwater polo team or hockey team or something.

Which does seem an interesting kind of sport. Probably doesn't have great value as a spectator sport. But, well, why do you like doing that? And he's a great guy. He loves rock climbing.

Since he's got married, his wife's not so keen on him doing the free stuff, you know, where you don't have ropes and so on. But there are people who do that because they get a buzz, they get a real kick, it's an adrenaline.

This idea of living life to the max that people have is this notion of just pushing yourself to the limit to an extreme, hence the notion of extreme sports and so on.

[13:57] Now, before people start coming home and saying, hey, I'm quite into those extreme sports, fair enough. Not necessarily critiquing that, but what I would like to critique is this, the notion that you can live life to the max without God, that's impossible.

And I'm sorry, drinking Pepsi won't really make any difference and won't enable you to live life to the max. In fact, there was a much better advert I saw which Pepsi obviously did not endorse, which carried the kind of lip smacking and then it went on a whole lot of things like gut rotting, stomach churning and all the various effects that all these sugar drinks could have on your life.

It certainly, whatever the health benefits or lack of benefits of them, they certainly don't make your life a maximum life. There's a secular pessimism and it's deeply ingrained in our society.

In the city of Dundee, they are just about to appoint a suicide officer because there have been so many suicides. The number one cause for death for young men in the Highlands aged between 18 and 30 is suicide.

By a mile. It's the number one cause of death because of the despair that people feel. Life without God is hopeless. Chapter 3 verses 1 to 15 on the other hand tell us that life under God is very different.

[15:21] Chapter 3 verses 1 to 15 is really just an explanation of chapter 2 verses 24 to 26. It expands the world view of the believer.

Now what's happening here is this is not despair. This is not stoicism. This is not cynicism. This is not someone saying there's a time for everything. There's a time to be born. There's a time to die. What can we do about it?

Some seem to think that this so stresses the sovereignty of God and the helplessness of man that it's a despairing counsel. We can't control time.

We can't control the seasons no matter what our skills, our efforts or our riches. So they say this is a counsel of despair. And it would be if everything was futile or if God was some kind of capricious deity like a cosmic chess player moving us around like pieces on a board.

And some people read this and they say this is *que sera sera*. Whatever will be, will be. We can't do anything about it. It's written in the stars. It's fates or whatever. But that is not what is being said here.

[16:28] In fact, this passage is for me the most extraordinarily beautiful summary of the optimistic view of the Christian life. And it's why Christians in whatever circumstances can be optimistic.

Firstly, it tells us that everything has a time. That's fairly obvious. There are times and seasons. There are rhythms and there is a rhythm to life. There are biorhythms and so on.

I, if you want to come and talk to me, if you want to call me up, try and avoid any time between two o'clock in the afternoon and five o'clock in the afternoon.

I don't know. Something happens to me then. I just, I personally, I like early morning. I like late at night. That's just, just a time of day that's, that's, I find it much, much harder to work.

When I was at university, I found it a lot easier to write. I could write, I'd set up a sheet of paper and go blank during the day. But see, about ten o'clock at night when you had an essay in for the following morning, it would just all flow, hopefully.

[17:33] By then, you could write and you could work those two hours between ten and twelve or the two hours between six and eight in the morning. Well, there's a sense in which it is actually wisdom to recognize the different peaks and troughs and rhythms that there are in your life.

ancient, near-eastern wisdom taught that real wisdom was in knowing the times. Understanding.

Is this the right time? Is this the right place to say this? Is this the right time to do this? Bo's reluctant coming to this pulpit given one of its previous ministers to ever quote Bob Dylan, but I feel like I have to at this point.

Come gather round people wherever you roam. Admit that the waters around you have grown. You better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone for the times that are changing. That's a cry to recognize.

What are the times? What seasons are we living in? There are fourteen couplets here. They deal with every range of human activity, saying there's a season and a purpose for everything.

[18:40] It begins, verse two, with the most momentous events in our life, birth and death. Then verses two and three go on to three various creative and destructive activities. Verse four deal with human emotions, private and public, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance.

The next two deal with friendship and enmity, a time to embrace, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. Perhaps that isn't immediately obvious to us what that means.

What that means is this, that the stones refer to filling up your neighbour's field with stones. It's if you've got a vendetta or something against your neighbour and basically you just say, hey, I'm clearing my stones and I'm throwing them into his field.

Or gathering the stones. The time to gather the stones is suggesting that what happens is that the stones that your neighbour throws, you gather and you make something constructive with it.

So he's throwing the stones in your field and you're saying, hey, I'm going to build a wall. Thanks very much, neighbour. That's not really what he intended. Verse 5, a time to say hello and a time to say goodbye.

[19:47] That's a time to embrace and a time to refrain. Verse 6, they are to do with possessions and our resolutions concerning them. A time to search, a time to give up, a time to keep, a time to throw away.

And verses 7 to 8 talk again about the various creative and destructive activities of humankind. Now I personally take great comfort from this idea that our times are in God's hand.

It's not fate and there's a time for everything. You may be going through a hard time just now. That will change. You may be going through a spiritual springtime.

It will turn to summer and perhaps to winter but overall, God is in charge of it all. Life under God, everything has a time.

Life under God means it has meaning. Time without God is meaningless. That's what verses 9 to 15 say.

[20 : 49] Man is offered a life that is joyful but not self-sufficient. When we try to live without God, we end up disrupting the seasons, not understanding the purposes and becoming vain and empty.

And in particular, there is this notion of eternity, time and eternity. Look at verse 11. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

He has also set eternity in the hearts of men. I remember one of the things that drew me to Christianity, that drew me to Jesus Christ, was trying to cope with the idea that I was just an animal who was born as a result ultimately of a great cosmic accident, who survived only on a planet that was ultimately going to be destroyed and who, when I died, I was just going to return to chemicals. And that was it. And you know, as hard as I tried, I could not intellectually or emotionally accept that. It does not make sense.

There is something within every human being that makes you realize that is not true. That is not what I am. It's a bit like someone trying to persuade you or brainwash you that in actual fact you are not a human being that's, you know, you're a cow and you should go around mooing or eating grass or whatever.

[22 : 17] Now, they might be able to brainwash you into that, but something inside you can say, no, no, this is not what I was meant to be. This is not what I am. It is impossible to imagine not existing because that is not the way God has made us.

God has set eternity in our hearts. And I think this is the greatest apologetic for God that we can use in terms of our culture in communicating the gospel today. He has set eternity in the hearts of men. There is a sense of beauty and a sense of eternity in the human heart. See, a non-Christian or someone who says, I'm an atheist, I'm not religious, I don't believe all that stuff, I don't believe in God. You might ask them why.

You might ask them about the God they don't believe in, because it's certainly not the God that you believe in. You might ask them lots of different things, and they might come up with the number one answer always is, what about evil, what about suffering?

Now, I have two responses to that. The first is always to turn it on its head and say, okay, God doesn't exist, so what about evil, what about suffering? It has no purpose, something mean, does it?

[23 : 26] Or, it's to turn the question again and say, what about beauty? Where do you get your concept of beauty from? Now, ultimately, if you're an absolute materialist, there is no such thing as beauty except it's just a feeling.

And you end up saying, well, anything can be beautiful, and it's all in the eye of the beholder, and so on. And because there's an element of truth in that, people accept it. But is that really the case? Is listening to Beethoven the same or just as beautiful as listening to three people who have never played a musical instrument in their lives and just start scratching it? Is that really the same?

It's not the same. Where does beauty come from? Eternity was and is a great concept. The eternity of God's dealing with humankind corresponds to something inside us.

We have a capacity for eternal things, even though we're frightened of it. We are concerned about the future. Is there any evidence whatsoever that rabbits or mice or cows or any other animal stays for the future, plans for the future, worries about the future, thinks or rationalizes in that way at all?

[24 : 45] No, but we do. We want to understand the beginning from the end. We have a sense of wonder. We have a sense of beauty which transcends our immediate situation.

We have a consciousness of God which is part of our nature. Romans 1 verse 18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, not confused, not messed up, not blurred, but clearly seen, being understood from what is being made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. It is incredible how many evangelical

atheists there are, people like Richard Dawkins and others who will say, I've seen the light, there is no God.

And they seek to persuade and convince others, and largely our society has become predicated on that, and it's darkness and foolishness. It's not rational and logical, it is the very opposite.

[26 : 01] Because within every single, it's like saying to a human being, there is no such thing as love. It's like saying to a human being, forget family and society. It's like saying to a human being, forget that you've got a right hand.

There is no such thing. Every single human being knows that there is something beyond, and has a concept of eternity and a concept of beauty.

Now the negative side of this is expressed in verse 10, that it is a burden. We have this sense of eternity, we have this sense of beauty, but, verse 11, we cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Walter Kaiser, Old Testament professor, puts it this way. He says it is a deep-seated desire, a compulsive drive to know the character, the composition, the meaning of the world, and to discern its purpose and destiny.

When a child says, what's that? Why? Why is that there? What's this? All that that child is doing is reflecting their humanity by expressing their curiosity about the world.

[27 : 05] What's that? What's it for? Why? Sadly, as we get older, people are being told more and more, don't question, don't ask why, don't ask what it is.

They get told, and then forget it anyway, just eat, drink and be merry. What's the point of questioning and wondering? But we know that. There's nothing under the sun that can ultimately satisfy this sense of the eternal.

There's always a striving after beauty. There's always a striving after the one. We have a desire as human beings to progress. We long for beauty. We long to improve.

We long to make things better. But here's the perversity of humankind. That the progress that brings us CDs and penicillin and DVDs and so on also brings us nuclear weapons and global warming.

in many ways, with the labor saving devices and the increase in leisure and pleasure time, we should be freer to enjoy life, but we're not. We are a frustrated generation, frustrated and disappointed that freedom and comfort have not brought more meaning and peace to our lives.

[28 : 19] The most technologically advanced countries in the world are also the ones that are marked most by family breakdown, drug addiction, abortion, violent crime, homelessness and suicide.

Malcolm Muggeridge put it brilliantly. He said this, The result is almost invariably the exact opposite of what's intended. Thus expanding public education has served to increase illiteracy.

Half a century of pacifist agitation has resulted in the two most ferocious and destructive wars in history. Political legalitarianism has made for a heightened class consciousness and sexual freedom has led to a rassel mania on a scale hitherto undreamed of.

We are being led largely by people who are fools. Fools because they leave God out of the equation. Now you bring God into the equation and it changes.

That's not bringing in human religion. It's not man-made gods. The word for beauty in verse 11, he has made everything beautiful in its time, is a word that if you would transliterate in Hebrews, Y-A-P-E-H, Yaffe, it is very, very close to the word for God, Yahweh.

[29 : 36] And that is deliberately done so. God is beautiful. And the sense of beauty is what C.S. Lewis called drippings of grace. It's what Philip Yancey talks about, rumors of transcendence.

It's like something like listening to Beethoven's pastoral or going for a walk at Glendale or something or holding a child in your arms. There's something beautiful there.

There's something wonderful. But without God, we forget it and we misuse it. God gives us the capacity for pleasure. It is a bizarre and twisted thing that even some Christians think that pleasure comes from the devil and we have to avoid it.

And certainly non-Christians say, oh, if you want to be a Christian, you can't. That's not about pleasure. And if you want to reject God and follow the devil, then that's about pleasure. No, it's not. It is from God's right hand there are pleasures evermore.

God gives us taste buds and sexual drive and the capacity to appreciate beauty. But without him, we will always misuse that and it will lead to overindulgence and destruction.

[30 : 44] So what do we do? We turn nudity into pornography. We turn wine into alcoholism. Food into gluttony. And human diversity into racism and prejudice. Instead of being good gifts, they become destructive to us.

Our life becomes a way, either frittered away or burnt out in over activity. Our life becomes a waste. Verse 12 to 15 is a summary of all that.

Verse 12, the secret of happiness to do good includes to enjoy life, to pursue and to enjoy a happy life, to eat and drink. Tokens of a contented and a happy life.

You know, even work can be satisfying. Secularism is replaced by theism, pessimism by optimism, human autonomy to human faith. There's even that great expression there which if you were to translate it in Latin would be *carpe deum*.

Seize the moment, enjoy life. The notion that the Christian is someone who curls up in a bowl, says the world is horrible, we're all going to die, I'm just waiting for Jesus, that's it.

[31 : 53] And the non-Christian is the person who says, hey, I'm going to go out and live for life. That is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that the Christian is someone who can seize the moment, who can enjoy life because the Christian understands what life is.

But the non-Christian destroys life. Can appreciate or really enjoy. There are, oh, there's eternity there. There's an awareness of beauty, but not able to apply it.

Verses 14 and 15, that's not despair. I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken from it. It's not despair because it's saying that whilst earth is transitory, unreliable, futile, security can be found in God's sovereignty and grace.

God's action is permanent. It is effective and complete and totally secure. That's why when you read in Romans 8, you understand this.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. You think of all the global crises. There's, I went to see the Constant Gardener last night and it's kind of a very peachy film in some ways.

[33 : 06] Very sad and beautiful film too. And one of the things it's warning about is human corruption and greed and oh no, there's going to be another TV epidemic throughout the world and if you listen to our news, we're going to run out of gas, we're all going to freeze and bad news.

We just seem to love it and to attract it. Well, that's because the non-Christian has no ultimate sense of security. Where's it going to come from? It's not going to come from the government or anybody else.

But for the Christian, it comes from God. We fear him, it says. God does it so that men will revere him. Verse 14. Not crave and fear, but reverence, respect and regard for God.

That is where our sense of beauty and our understanding of the eternal is satisfied. Because ultimately, it is a sense of God and a sense for God.

That's why we're going to sing in a moment, let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. It's impossible to see life as beautiful.

[34 : 15] You know that Italian film? I can't speak Italian, but it's in Italian and it's called, subtitled, *Life is Beautiful*. Absolutely phenomenal film, which carries over to some extent this message, I think, in a way falsely, because again, it kind of leaves God out of it.

But you know that the idea, the story of man being in a concentration camp and giving his life for his son and the beauty that comes out of that most ugly of situations.

For the Christian, it is possible to be in the most ugly situation and still to see beauty and still even to be content.

One final thing, verse 15, whatever is has already been, what will be has been before and God will call the past to account. It's what in Disney speak might be called the circle of life, if you've ever seen the *Lion King*.

It's the times. It's God who keeps the cycles of history going. For those of you who know history or who studied history, there are various theories of how history works.

[35 : 34] Most people accept that there is some kind of course that history is going on. Some Christians have a kind of misunderstanding saying the world started here and has been going downhill ever since until Jesus returns.

No. No, that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches the world goes down and up and down and up and down and up. It goes in circles, really. But it's not circles going nowhere.

Neither is it Marxist fatalism. The most popular view of history in many of our academic circles is that there is an inevitableness about history. That's true, but it's an inevitableness that's not based on economic theory or theories of human beings or evolutionary theory.

It is an inevitableness that is based upon God. It is God who holds our times in his hands. Now, what all that means is this. No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, as a human being, you are not an insignificant insect crawling from one sad annihilation to another.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ, you are a child of God being prepared for an eternal home. Go home and read John chapter 14 or 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

[36 : 51] Lord, Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. There is a significance about your life.

There is a wonder about your life and a purpose about your life, which is eternal. The Puritan pastor Thomas Watson said this, Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset.

Eternity to the wicked is a night that has no sunrise. God has set eternity in your hearts. You can never get rid of that any more than you can get rid of the fact that you are a human being.

Because that is what being a human being means. You have eternity in your hearts. What are you going to do to that? How are you going to deal with it? How are you going to live your life? Who are you going to follow?

Without Jesus Christ, your life is heading for destruction and meaninglessness. With Jesus Christ, you've got it all.

[37 : 58] Now, it's obvious from what we read in the Bible, from what we experience ourselves, that doesn't mean that we don't have any problems or difficulties and everything. But it does give us the framework in which to live our lives with all its hassles and all its troubles and all its problems.

Do you really want to have a meaningless and empty life? Albert Speer was known as Hitler's architect, became the third most powerful man in Nazi Germany.

It's a phenomenal book. He's the only Nazi ever to have admitted real guilt. Top Nazi who ever admitted real guilt. And he wrestled with it. And there's a woman called Gita Serini, who's a fabulous writer, who knew Speer for many, many years and has written a book which I'm reading for about the third time now, which documents her relationship with Speer and what he thought and how he went through this angst of what had he done and why it was wrong and so on.

And last night, I was just reading this before I went to sleep. It was some strange bedtime reading, I know. But last night I was reading this before I went to sleep and there's an extraordinary story there.

It's a story of a young German Christian who, because he was a nationalist and loved his country, thought in the 1930s that the Nazis were going to bring greatness back to Germany.

[39 : 25] So he joined up with the Nazi party. But then he began to hear rumors about things that were going on. And he decided that he would join the SS to find out if they were true because he didn't want to listen to rumor.

And when he joined the SS, he rose in the ranks of the SS. He ended up being asked to take Cyclone B, the gas that was used in Auschwitz and Treblinka and elsewhere to kill millions of people.

And he knew what it was for. He could not believe it. He sabotaged. Every time he took it, he sabotaged it and claimed it was defective and so on. He tried desperately.

He met with a Swedish diplomat, trying to persuade the Swedish diplomat of what was going on.

And the Swedish diplomat recalls of the angst and the suffering and the pain and the sorrow in that man's eyes about what was happening.

And the diplomat, to the end of his days, regrets that although he acted to some degree, neither the Swedish nor British nor American governments acted or believed upon what was said.

[40 : 40] What struck me when I read the young man's testimony, the Nazi SS officer, who was a Christian, he ended up being arrested after the Second World War because the evidence about him wasn't available, he ended up actually committing suicide.

He was in such despair, he thought he was about to be executed. But what struck me was what Speer said about him and about other people. He said, you know, and I'm paraphrasing a bit, but the only people who really opposed us were the Christians because they believed in life.

Hitler said, we have to get rid of this Christianity which has this ridiculous notion of life as being precious. Now, I honestly believe that's your only two choices.

You accept that life is precious and a gift from God, or ultimately and logically you go down the route of fascism and the Nazis or whatever totalitarian, evil dictatorship, cruelty you want to call it. because that's the choice we're faced with. And I would encourage us all to think about that, not only in terms of our own lives, but our country and culture and society.
[41 : 51] May God bless his word to us. Let's remain seated and pray.