

Three Assurances to Take Through Life

Intro: Do you believe in ghosts? All of us can probably remember as children how much we enjoyed ghost stories. And now as adults we enjoy it when the grandkids come over and we sit around the fire pit telling ghost stories.

And occasionally there were those strange unexplained anomalies that would almost make you think that some houses were haunted.

My concern tonight has to do with those ghosts that lurk inside our souls and haunt us from within.

Three "ghosts" that haunt all people.

The ghost of futility

As we go through life the ghost of futility appears from time to time. He'll whisper, "You've wasted your time. You've wasted your money. You've wasted your effort."

And in fact we'll go through times when it appears that our efforts have seemingly been in vain. We will ask ourselves, "Is there meaning to what I'm doing? Will my life have mattered? What if everything I've done has been for nothing?"

The ghost of failure

Another ghost that will haunt us is failure. He'll whisper, "You aren't any good. You messed up again. You are a failure! There's no hope for you!"

And in fact we will have times when we have real reasons to look back with regret, to question decisions we've made. We will see definite wrong turns that we made and that ended badly. We may feel like we have failed as we are haunted by the "what if's..."

The ghost of mortality

The third ghost is mortality. Occasionally he's whisper, "Your life is coming to an end. You're running out of time. You'll soon be forgotten."

And again we must soberly reflect upon the fact of our mortality. No matter what we achieve or don't achieve, we'll eventually die and ultimately be forgotten. The specter of death can haunt us.

The gospel provides the assurances we need to face all three of these and drive them away. There are three things that the gospel makes clear to those who believe and hopefully will draw those who do not. First, if we truly trust in God...

Our life is not futile.

There is a sense in which we could all probably relate to the words of the writer of Ecclesiastes. It is as if his first words in his treatise on life under the sun could have been written with a sigh: "Vanity of vanity; all is vanity," he wrote.

And for the next twelve chapters he would oscillate between viewing life only from an earth-bound perspective and viewing it from an eternal one. The more he thought about life from the earth-bound perspective the more depressing and futile life seemed to be. Here are some of the themes he explores:

A world that goes nowhere (one big cosmic treadmill)

All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:8-9)

A world that is broken and cannot be fixed.

What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. (Ecclesiastes 1:15)

A world where human achievement and material possessions don't ultimately satisfy.

And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

A world that isn't fair.

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. (Ecclesiastes 7:15)

A world where none of your advantages pay off.

I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

But of course, the preacher's philosophical approach is intended to drive us to the conclusion that there must be something more! And in that vein he shows us how that bringing God into the picture can't change the world, but it can change the way we relate to the world's vanity. In fact, we can learn how to live life under the sun with faith, with enjoyment, with gratitude, and with accountability.

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

But what the OT anticipates, the gospel makes much more clear. If we believe in God...

Our life is not futile, because we have a real purpose!

The NT shows us that there really is a purpose in it all. That God is working all things after the counsel of His will.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, (Eph. 1:10-11)

He made us to seek and find Him.

and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; (Acts 17:26-27)

And he plans for us to share His glory forever in His presence.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)

And all that we do in this life may not always get the results we seek, but the effort is never futile:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Our failures are not fatal.

Again, there is a sense in which the Scripture clearly reveal that our failures are real and certainly not insignificant.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Again and again the Scriptures show that sin has consequences.

Our sin hurts God.

Our sin brings pain to others.

Our sin brings pain to ourselves.

But the gospel makes clear that if we believe, our failures are not fatal... because we have God's forgiveness

What if we had to live forever with the burden of our sins? What if there was no remedy for our selfish behavior even when we came to realize how selfish it had been?

But God in His grace has offered pardon for our failures. If our sin has earned us a spiritual death sentence, then the great judge of heaven and earth has pronounced our pardon:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, (Ephesians 1:7)

Our death is not final.

The Scriptures themselves may make us uncomfortable aware of the certainty of death.

For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

The Hebrew writer made the surety of death and judgment the basis for affirming Jesus' one time offering for sin.

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

But if we believe in the Lord, our death is not fatal because we have a living hope of eternal life.

Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, (Titus 1:1-2)

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, (1 Corinthians 15:22-23)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Conclusion: In your quiet moments, do you ever think about these things? Have you said to yourself, "My life has no purpose." Or, "I'm a failure." Or, "One day I'll be gone forever and what different will it make?"

Jesus can drive away the ghosts of futility, failure, and mortality; and give us purpose, forgiveness, and hope.