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Moments of Meditation and Reflection

Sunday 21 March 2021

Ecclesiastes 3

¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^{no} no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in their toil—this is the gift of God.

The author of Ecclesiastes describes happiness as the ultimate "nothing better" in life. Although we as humans were endowed with the gift of a sense of eternity, we still cannot fathom God's works, God's decisions, God's ways. When he says "be happy", in fact in the original text it means: be extremely happy, exuberantly happy.

What is happiness? In this chapter the author describes life, time and seasons by listing the contrasts therein: (Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). And this perspective of life and the inevitabilities of times, seasons, days, events and emotions leaves one with a sense of desperation. A sense of helplessness. The same emotion we experience when negative things happen: death, weeping, silence when you need comforting, to mention but a few. In fact: contrasts, contrasting emotions and times, are inevitably part of life.

Is there a solution to this riddle? Can life be different? Is there an escape route from this maze of conflicts?

One escape route is firmly closed by the author. There is no way you can unravel whether something was caused by God, or allowed by God, or mistakenly added to your life or omitted from life by God. We cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

There was an old man in a village, very poor, but even kings were jealous of him because he had a beautiful white horse. Kings offered fabulous prizes for the horse, but the man would say,

"This horse is not a horse to me, he is a person. And how can you sell a person, a friend?" The man was poor, but he never sold the horse.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. The whole village gathered and said, "You foolish old man! We knew that someday the horse would be stolen. It would have been better to sell it. What a misfortune!"

The old man said, "Don't go so far as to say that. Simply say that the horse is not in the stable. This is the fact; everything else is judgement. Whether it is a misfortune or a blessing I don't know, because this is just a fragment. Who knows what is going to follow it?"

People laughed at the old man. They had always known he was a little crazy. But after fifteen days, suddenly one night the horse returned. He had not been stolen, he had escaped into the wild. And not only had he returned, he brought a dozen wild horses with him.

Again the people gathered and they said, "Old man, you were right. This was not a misfortune, it has indeed proved to be a blessing."

The old man said, "Again you are going too far. Just say that the horse is back... who knows whether it is a blessing or not?" It is only a fragment. You read a single word in a sentence - how can you judge the whole book?"

This time the people could not say much, but inside they knew that he was wrong. Twelve beautiful horses had come.

The old man had an only son who started to train the horses. Just a week later he fell from a horse and his legs were broken. The people gathered again, and again they judged. They said, "Again you proved your foolishness. It was a misfortune. Your only son has lost the use of his legs, and in your old age he was your only support. Now you are poorer than ever."

The old man said, "You are obsessed with judgement. Don't go that far. Say only that my son had broken his legs. Life comes in fragments and more is never given to you."

It happened that after a few weeks the country went to war, and all the young men of the town were forcibly taken for the military. Only the old man's son was left because he was crippled. The whole town was crying and weeping, because it was a losing fight and they knew that most of the young people would never come back. They came to the old man and they said, "You were right, old man - this has proved a blessing. Maybe your son is crippled, but he is still with you. Our sons are gone forever."

The old man said again, "You go on and on judging. Nobody knows! Only say this, that your sons have been forced to enter the army and my son has not been forced. But only God, who sees the total picture, knows whether it is a blessing or a misfortune."

Judge not, otherwise you will never become one with the total. With fragments you will be obsessed, with small things you will jump to conclusions. Once you judge you have stopped growing.

What the is the solution, the escape route from the maze? "There is nothing better than to be happy and do good while you live. Where to find happiness? In the little things. To eat, to drink, to do good, even to do what you do well. Einstein once said: "A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin: what more does one need to be happy?" W Baran Wolfe once said: "If you observe a really happy man you will find him building a boat, writing a symphony, educating his son, growing dahlias in his garden or looking for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi desert. He will not be searching for happiness as if it were a collar button that has rolled under the radiator. He will not be striving for it as a goal in itself. He will have become aware that he is happy in the course of living life twenty four crowded hours of the day."

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.

Be unique! Be honest with yourself! Live and discover the inner light of happiness. Everything is a gift of God.