

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

RCL Readings¹ – Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-12; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

ACNA Readings – Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11; Psalm 49; Colossian 3:5-17; Luke 12:13-21

Seasonal Introduction. This season is often called “Ordinary Time,” a term derived from ordinal, meaning “numbered” or “in sequence.” However, there is nothing ordinary about this time. Rather, it is a time when we may reflect on how God (starting on Trinity Sunday and ending with Christ the King Sunday) has been at work in our own lives, the lives of his people, and how he will continue to work in the days to come. Ordinary Time is a season when we are invited to perceive the mystery of God at work in our daily lives, in the ordinary, in the mundane.

Common Theme. Death is the end of our life. But in our life we are called to walk righteously before God. Death is also the beginning of life. For we have already died and have been raised to life. We should not walk in death but in accordance with the life God has given us.

Hebraic Context. “Money is the root of all evil.” This sounds Biblical. After all, wealth and corruption are often seen together. Both the Torah and the Prophets speak against the evil of the wealthy exploiting the poor. Deuteronomy 24:10-13 commands Israelites to return a poor person’s cloak taken as collateral before nightfall so they can sleep in warmth. Verses 14-15 go on to command employers to pay their workers—especially the poor and needy, whether Israelites or sojourners—on the day they work and not to withhold their wages.²

An ostrakon from the 7th century BC (around the time of King Josiah) found near Yavneh-Yam, contains a complaint from a worker whose employer, Hoshayahu, would not return his garment after a full day of work. This ostrakon preserves a formal petition to a local commander, showing that the Torah’s commands in Deuteronomy 24:10-13 were not merely theoretical—they addressed real abuse:

“May my lord, the commander, hear the word of his servant: Your servant harvested... gathered and stored before Shabbat... then came Hoshayahu, the son of Shovai and took the garment of your servant when I completed my harvest. As always, he took the garment of your servant and all my brothers will answer for me, those who harvested with me in the heat of the sun—my brothers will testify for me. Amen. I am innocent from any guilt and now, let him return my garment! I call out to the commander to return the garment of your servant and grant him mercy. Now return the garment of your servant and do not send him away.”

¹ RCL Alternate readings include: Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43

² See also: James 5:1-6

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

The prophet Amos likewise condemns the actions of the wealthy elite, declaring, “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,³ who are on the mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy.” He continues by declaring the judgment of God will come upon them. Yet we must not misquote Scripture in saying “money is the root of all evil.” Paul writes in I Timothy 6:10: “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith”; wealth itself is never considered to be evil in the Bible.

Many righteous people are described as wealthy in Scripture: Job, Abraham, Boaz, the Shunammite woman, various kings of Judah, as well as Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, Joanna, Mary, and Martha. Wealth was often seen as a blessing from God. When first listening to Jesus' parable about a barn full of grain,⁴ our first assumption should be that the man is being blessed by God, as stated in Proverbs 3:9-10, “honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” That Jesus continued by referencing Ecclesiastes instead⁵ and stating that the man should be rich toward God but was foolish should be surprising. Except, Jesus was specifically speaking against greed, not wealth.⁶

Greed is a sin. Both bribery and greed disqualify a man from serving as a judge, elder, or deacon.⁷ James warns against favoritism towards the wealthy, going so far as to say “are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?” Yet Exodus 23:3 warns against the opposite error: “Do not show partiality to a poor man in his lawsuit.” We must be just—neither flattering the rich nor romanticizing the poor.⁸

Biblically, wealth can be a blessing, but it can also become a tool for exploitation. The poor can be just as greedy as the rich. We can only serve one master, and if we crave wealth we will eventually wander away from the faith. If God is gracious to us—whether by sending the rain in its season for our daily bread or, in his generosity, by granting even greater abundance—we are to be thankful to God, knowing all things come from Him and not from our own working hands.

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23.⁹ Ecclesiastes appears to be written by Solomon. He is both the son of David and surpassed all who came before him in Jerusalem in both wealth and

³ The region of Bashan corresponds to the modern Golan Heights. Unlike the arid southern and central regions of Israel, which often support only goats—or sheep under skilled shepherding—Bashan was known for its rich volcanic soil, higher rainfall, and abundant grasses. This made it particularly suitable for raising and fattening up cattle.

⁴ See: Luke 12:16-21

⁵ Ecclesiastes 2:24, “Eat, drink, and find enjoyment”

⁶ Luke 12:15

⁷ Exodus 18:21; Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; I Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7

⁸ See also: Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16-17; James 2:9

⁹ ACNA includes Ecclesiastes 1:15-2:11

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

possessions.¹⁰ A recurring theme in Christian Bible studies that look at the life of Solomon is the question of how a man so wise could end up so foolish. Second Temple Judaism, however, was more divided in its assessment of Solomon.

Sirach 47:12-22 offers a brief synopsis of Solomon's reign—an era of peace and prosperity. He was renowned for his wisdom and proverbs, but he was turned away from God, led astray by his many wives. His errors caused the division between Israel and Judah. Yet Sirach affirms that “the Lord will never give up on His mercy” and that a descendant of David would be preserved forever.

Meanwhile, some sages wished to uphold Solomon's God-given wisdom and greatness, arguing that he did not fail. Rather it was only the women who were with him who sinned, “Rabbi Yonatan said: Anyone who says that King Solomon sinned is nothing other than mistaken.”¹¹ Yet many other Jewish sages held that Solomon did transgress each of the specific royal prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17:14–17:¹² by acquiring horses and chariots,¹³ by taking many wives and concubines,¹⁴ and by amassing excessive silver and gold.¹⁵

Ecclesiastes was copied and preserved, as seen in 4Q109 (4QQohelet) even though its canonicity was still under debate. But unlike the Psalms, Isaiah, Deuteronomy, or even Job, it was rarely used in discussions or commentary. It is notably absent from the writings of several prominent scholars of the Second Temple period, including Philo, Josephus and Ben Sira. Yet it gives us a glimpse into what Solomon himself may have thought—and it starts with vanity.

Vanity, הֶבֶל (*hevel*), literally means a “breath” or “vapor,” and is often used to describe the fleeting nature of man's life:¹⁶ “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”¹⁷ Solomon looked at everything humans strive to accomplish—“all that is done under heaven”—and it appears to just be busywork, a vapor here and then gone.

Solomon speaks not only of wisdom, but also of folly—not only of knowledge, but also of madness. In pursuing pleasure and laughter, Solomon could not discover what it produced. So

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:1, 16

¹¹ Shabbat 56b.5-11

¹² Sanhedrin 21b.16-17

¹³ I Kings 10:26-29

¹⁴ I Kings 11:1-3

¹⁵ I Kings 10:14-25, 27

¹⁶ הֶבֶל (*hevel*) also sounds remarkably like הֶבֶל (*havel*)—Abel. In fact, only the first time Abel is mentioned is הֶבֶל (*havel*) used—every other time he is spoken of, it is הֶבֶל (*hevel*). Abel was the first man to die, his life cut short and gone.

¹⁷ Psalm 39:5; See also, Psalm 62:9; Psalm 144:4; Job 7:16 along with Isaiah 40:6-7; Job 14:1-2; James 4:14

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

he started projects that would have great benefit: building houses, vineyards and orchards, gardens, parks, and waterworks. He bought workers, slaves, to manage his estate, orchards, and the many herds and flocks he had acquired. Intriguingly, Solomon states that surely these were “good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.” But “then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind.” Whether in pleasure or toil, “there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” Everything was but a breath of air.

Why did Solomon hate the work he had done? Ecclesiastes 2:18-23 reminds us that we will die and cannot take anything with us—all we have will be left to the one who comes after us. What has all our striving accomplished? In the end, no man retains anything from his labor. And so, even though he had already declared that pleasure produced nothing and toil was good for the children of man, Solomon returned to “eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.” Or, as in the Parable of Jesus, “relax, eat, drink, be merry”.¹⁸

Solomon knew the end, even as Jesus declared “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” This is the end of the man “who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”¹⁹

Psalm 49. The Sons of Korah were familiar with, and often wrote, about the nearness of death. Their history was forever intertwined with their own ransom from death, rooted in the moment their forefather challenged Moses—trusting in his own strength and wisdom, refusing to listen to the prophet of God. Yet some of the sons of Korah left their father (against all custom) and walked to Moses, choosing obedience over deference and ambition. Of course, Korah didn't receive power—his path, and all who followed him, led to the depths of the earth: “their form... consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell.”

Psalm 49 isn't prayer, thanksgiving, praise, or petition—it is a statement and a challenge. Can you figure out our riddle?²⁰ The Sons of Korah would stand on the Temple Mount and sing to all who would hear—rich and poor alike. All were welcome to ponder the proverb, and the writer himself would be the first one to answer it.

The question to be solved: Why should I fear in times of trouble? There are people with more power than I have—whether through wealth, glory, or the influence that draws many followers.

¹⁸ Luke 12:19

¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

²⁰ Riddles are relatively rare in biblical and Jewish writings. One of the few true examples appears in the story of Samson, whose riddle is directed at the Philistines—a people with strong Aegean and Mediterranean cultural ties, in contrast to the Hebraic tradition.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

Unfortunately, some of these same people, in their iniquity, cause harm rather than choosing to follow God and shepherd the poor and the weak.

The Sons of Korah don't leave us to struggle for the answer, however. Why shouldn't we fear? The answer is simple: What money can we bring before almighty God that will save us as we harm those He loves? What wisdom can save them if they refuse to listen and be received by God? What power can stop death from coming? The only one with power in the equation is God.

As understood from their own history, having people who will follow your misplaced confidence will not save you—it will only bring them down with you. Korah and his followers were swallowed by the grave and descended to Sheol with all their goods and possessions. His sons, however, were ransomed by God—for He received them when they heard Moses, listened to the voice of the prophet of God, and obeyed God. Psalm 49 may not be a riddle in the classic sense, but few take the time to discern (and live by) the answer to such a straightforward proverb.

Colossians 3:1-11.²¹ Paul's message to the Colossians is that they should live the resurrection. The resurrection is not only a past or future event but something that should be lived out daily by followers of Jesus. Our practical faith walk is rooted in the theological truth that the Messiah has been raised from the dead and has ascended to heaven. Jesus is our life. He doesn't simply give us life. Before the breath of God, there was only formed dust—after the breath of God, there was a living creature. Before Jesus we “were dead in [our] trespasses” but in and through Him, we are alive. Paul suggests that, given this truth, we must adopt a different worldview: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”²²

Paul openly states what is earthly. Having already spoken of the invisible God (in contrast to idols that Gentiles in Colossae may have worshipped before they heard the word of truth), Paul doesn't continue to speak on traditional idolatry in this list. The Jewish commitment to monotheism had long distinguished them from the nations. Idolatry was no longer a common sin among the Jewish people, and many Gentiles had already been drawn toward Israel's God because of this godly obedience. However, two sins had risen in its place: greed and anger.

Jesus confronted greed repeatedly—a greed that took precedence over walking after God. While greed is condemned throughout the Torah and the Prophets, covetousness is now declared by Paul to be a form of idolatry in Colossians 3:5. Anger and hatred, later declared to be the reason for the destruction of Herod's temple, also became more common as Hellenism and Hasidean piety clashed in Jewish culture.²³ This resulted in wars between brothers and

²¹ ACNA includes Colossians 3:12-17

²² Paul continues in the next two paragraphs explaining what the two options—the things of earth and the things that are above—look like in practical details.

²³ I Maccabees 1-2; II Maccabees 4-5

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

even massacres. This anger and hatred between brothers was already written about in some depth in II Maccabees.²⁴ Later, Josephus records the crucifixion of 800 Pharisees, along with their wives and children, under the Sadducean influence of Alexander Jannaeus.

These sins, along with sexual immorality, are to be put to death.²⁵ But to live out the resurrection, we do not merely put to death what is earthly—we also rise to walk in newness of life. If we are to overcome by our testimony, we must be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, and gracious towards one another. We must forgive one another “as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” This does not mean we are kind only to those we find tolerable. Rather, we echo Jesus’ depth of forgiveness as He declared “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” We are called to live in love, walk in harmony, and encourage one another to do everything in the name of our Lord.

Luke 12:13-21. God appointed many judges to settle disputes among His people and make for peace between brothers. Moses was a judge among the people of Israel and, at the advice of his father-in-law, he set many other judges over the clans of Israel.²⁶ Often, disputes could be judged at the gate of the city;²⁷ other times, litigants would travel to a famous judges, like Deborah,²⁸ to settle harder disputes. Kings, such as Solomon, also became judges over disputes, as they were appointed by God. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul tells us that we should be subject to governing authorities

Deuteronomy 17:8-13 specifically states that cases too difficult to settle locally should be brought to the officially appointed judge, a Levitical priest, in Jerusalem. The final judgment should be obeyed: “You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left.” Once a judgment was made, the litigants could not go from person to person looking for someone who would rule in their favor. In fact, Moses declares, “The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die.”

²⁴ II Maccabees 5:6 speaks of some of this in-fighting, “But Jason kept relentlessly slaughtering his compatriots, not realizing that success at the cost of one’s kindred is the greatest misfortune but imagining that he was setting up trophies of victory over enemies and not over compatriots.”

²⁵ I often hear about how the Jewish people and Israel have the Torah and yet choose not to follow God or heed His Messiah. But we are said to have died to elementary principles and are to put to death these things which are earthly. We are also raised to life with Christ. And yet churches argue over politics until they break apart, sexual immorality scandals show the hypocrisy of the church (or the church accepts sexual immorality as righteousness), and greed preaches louder than the truth of the gospel.

²⁶ Exodus 18

²⁷ Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Ruth 4:1-12;

²⁸ Judges 4:4-5

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

When the Messiah comes, He would judge righteously—whether regarding the poor and meek, the kings of the earth, or disputes between nations.²⁹ However, the man who came to Jesus does not seem to understand Him to be the Messiah, nor does he present any credible evidence for a judgment to be given—he tells Jesus what the verdict should be. On the one hand, many of the priests in Jerusalem were corrupt—having bought their positions with bribes. On the other hand, this man's dispute should have been simple enough to be judged by the elders of his town—inheritance was a known, prescribed judgment.

The firstborn son would inherit a double portion, while the remainder of the inheritance would be divided between the sons.³⁰ We aren't told whether the man had a valid argument, although the fact that the matter wasn't already settled suggests his litigation lacked legal merit. But Jesus did not focus on the judgment itself; rather, He focused on the reason the man would come to Him in the first place.

Leading up to the destruction of Solomon's temple and exile, the people of Israel were little different from their neighbors in worshipping idols. However, when the Israelites returned from exile (or even remained in the diaspora), they had turned from idolatry and no longer were drawn to foreign gods. They had been told to thrive in the foreign lands they found themselves in—told to build houses, plant crops, and pray for the land they were in.³¹ The Israelites worked hard and grew. Obedience brought success and wealth—but success and wealth brought pride and greed. Jesus did not have to combat idolatry—that would be left to Paul to discuss with his Gentile audience in Acts and the epistles. But Jesus did have to speak on money, or mammon: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”³²

When the man tells Jesus, “Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me,” he isn't asking for righteous judgment that would make for peace, but for goods and possessions. And so, Jesus warns against greed, or covetousness. There was nothing wrong with the exiles prospering—in fact, Jeremiah encouraged it—just as there was nothing wrong with Abraham or Solomon being rich.

However, Solomon continuously increased his wealth in a manner that was neither just—his son's kingdom would be divided because of the promise of continued unfair taxation—³³nor

²⁹ Isaiah 2:4; Isaiah 11:3-4; Psalm 72:2-4; John 5:22; Matthew 25:31-46

³⁰ Deuteronomy 21:15-17; See also Mishnah Bava Batra 8.1-9.10 which has an in-depth discussion on inheritance laws.

³¹ Jeremiah 29:4-7

³² Matthew 6:24

³³ I Kings 4:7-28. Solomon created 12 tax districts, but all of them were from the northern and transjordan regions while Judah did not have to pay the same taxes. Additionally, in I Kings 5:13-16 Solomon employed both forced labour and seasonal or skilled labour. In I Kings 12:18, the captain of the forced labor (possibly foreign slaves, I Kings 9:20-22) was sent by Rehoboam to speak to the Israelites about the

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

godly, for he disobeyed the commands of God in Deuteronomy 17:17. And so, Solomon writes, “I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me... he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun.”³⁴

The doctrine of the resurrection was extremely popular toward the end of the Second Temple period, and with the resurrection came the understanding that riches on earth aren't the reward we should seek. In discussing Ecclesiastes, Rabbi Meir, a teacher of the 2nd Century, said, “When a person comes into the world, his fists are clenched, as though to say: The entire world is mine, I will inherit it. When he takes his leave of the world his hands are open, as though to say: I did not inherit anything in this world.”³⁵ The Wisdom of Ben Sirach, wrote on wealth and death—almost precisely parallel to the parable Jesus would use to teach on the same subject: “A person becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this: when he says, ‘I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!’ he does not realize how time passes by; he will leave them to others and will die.”³⁶ Rabbi Yona argued, “Is there eating and drinking that accompanies a person to the grave? What accompanies him? It is Torah and good deeds.”³⁷

The problem with the rich man in Jesus' parable isn't that he works hard or is shrewd in his work—it is that he “lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” As Paul would later say, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”³⁸ Deuteronomy 8 promises exile to those who turn away from God and to idols, but it also speaks to greed and laying up treasures for oneself:

“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His rules and His statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...”³⁹

work they would soon have to endure. The slave captain, Adoram (Adoniram), was killed by the northerners while Jeroboam, a captain of skilled labourers, was made king.

³⁴ Ecclesiastes 2:18-20, see also Ecclesiastes 2:24, “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.”

³⁵ Kohelet Rabbah 5.14.1

³⁶ Sirach 11:18-19

³⁷ Kohelet Rabbah 5.18.1

³⁸ I Corinthians 15:32

³⁹ Deuteronomy 8:11-18

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

Hebraic Perspective. From the moment Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, death became the inheritance of mankind. Farmers, merchants, kings, and philosophers have wrestled with death in every culture and medium on earth. Solomon saw death at the end of life and neither wisdom nor foolishness, pleasure nor toil made a difference, for all died. And so he hated life as it was grievous to him.

The Book of Wisdom, likely written in the first century BC, writes of the ungodly:

“They reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, ‘Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been, for the breath in our nostrils is smoke...there is no return from our death because it is sealed up and no one turns back.’”⁴⁰

The ungodly continue, in anger with the righteous for:

“He professes to have knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord... he calls the last end of the righteous happy and boasts that God is his father. Let us see if his word are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life, for if the righteous man is God's child, He will help him... Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”⁴¹

The author of the Book of Wisdom concludes:

“In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster and their going from us to be their destruction, but they are at peace. For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of Himself... They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.”⁴²

The true divide between the righteous and the unrighteous is not always visible in life—but it becomes unmistakable in their death. For, while the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous is registered in their actions during life, they both die—they both suffer affliction (often the righteous suffer more than the unrighteous). Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” would ring true.

⁴⁰ Book of Wisdom 2:1-5

⁴¹ Book of Wisdom 2:13-20

⁴² Book of Wisdom 3:1-9

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 13 – Year C

While bodily resurrection is often associated with Second Temple Jewish theology, its roots reach far earlier in the Hebrew Scriptures. Psalm 49:13-15 speaks of death but also declares “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me.” We see belief in the resurrection as early as Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving, “The LORD kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.”⁴³ And Daniel 12:2 is clear, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” There is a reward for both the righteous and the unrighteous after death and the resurrection.

The Bible not only provides us with a doctrine, but with the physical reality of the resurrection. Elijah resurrects the child of a widow that he was staying with in Zarephath.⁴⁴ Elisha does something similar to the son of a Shunamite woman⁴⁵ (2 Kings 4) and then there is the extremely lucky unnamed man who, when thrown into the tomb of Elisha, comes back to life.⁴⁶ Jesus raised several people from the dead—culminating in Lazarus—and at his own death, God raised many saints from their tombs.⁴⁷

Finally, Jesus became the firstborn from the dead. “In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”⁴⁸

Living and walking according to the resurrection is essential if we wish to set our minds on things that are above. The early martyrs, from the Jewish exiles who were murdered for their continued obedience to God⁴⁹ to Stephen and the men and women of the early church who remained faithful, could continue in their faithfulness in large part because they understood that they weren’t reliant on rewards here on earth—they could look to God, the author and finisher of their faith, who would ransom their souls even from Sheol.

We may not be called to martyrdom, but we must not live as Solomon did in despair—haunted by the futility of toil, seeing death as the great equalizer. We are called to live today, for we have already been raised with Christ. We are called to be rich toward God, for we will one day rise to everlasting life in the presence of our God. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”⁵⁰

⁴³ I Samuel 2:6

⁴⁴ I Kings 17:17-24

⁴⁵ II Kings 4:18-37

⁴⁶ II Kings 13:20-21

⁴⁷ Matthew 27:52-53

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 15:20-22

⁴⁹ II Maccabees 6-7; IV Maccabees 5-18

⁵⁰ Colossians 3:4