

Trinity 8 2022 – the Cost of Living Crisis

What has God to say about the cost of living crisis? As a preacher of the Word of God, I thought I'd better give it a go, but what to say? I'm not a politician or an economist, a business man or a farmer. What do I know about how the cost of living crisis should be fixed, if indeed it can be fixed?

Not much is the answer to that, but what you and I can do is to draw attention to the principles on which the world works, to God's Word in fact. I came across some interesting verses from Ecclesiastes chapter 5 in my daily readings last week.

⁸ *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.* There's a message for those who do have wealth and power. You are answerable to God for how you use them. If you are greedy and selfish and indifferent to the needs of the poor or if you deliberately oppress others, you will incur the displeasure of God.

⁹ *Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.* In the end, everybody from the lowest to the highest depends on Nature's bounty – the crops we grow, the goods we manufacture, the resources we mine, coal, oil and natural gas. It all comes from the land. It all comes from God. It follows that we have to take care of the natural world, to receive its bounty with thankful hearts, to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us, and to see that everyone has a fair share, enough both of the basic necessities and of the good things which enrich life beyond mere existence. These good things are spiritual and mental as well as material and they are given to us to share.

¹⁰ *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.* If you believe that material prosperity, having lots of stuff, enjoying the best of everything money can provide will make you happy, you are mistaken. The more you have, the more you want. Greed and selfishness on the part of the powerful exacerbates the poverty of the poor, uses up the natural resources of the planet and degrades our environment with pollution. But how much is enough? How much is too much? How do we know when to stop?

¹¹ *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?* When you come to think about it, you can only eat so much food, wear so many clothes, occupy so many rooms. What's the point of having more than you need? If you're in your mansion in Belgravia, you're not on your yacht at Monaco and *vice versa*. So what's the point of having them both? Owning lots of stuff, enjoying tremendous power and influence brings huge responsibilities, not least to your staff, your family and, most likely, to all sorts of hangers on who care more about what you can do for them than they do about you.

¹² *The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.* That's true, isn't it? You sleep better after an honest day's work than you do after stuffing yourself at a banquet.

¹³ *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* Wealth may bring trouble: jealousy, an increasing tendency to selfishness, family rows, investigations by HMRC, and so on & so forth.

¹⁴ *But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.* ¹⁵ *As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.* ¹⁶ *And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?* ¹⁷ *All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.* You can't take it with you. You don't know what those who come after you will do with their legacy. All of us will leave this world as we came into it – with nothing. So what really matters in the end? What really matters is what St James calls *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father*. What is pure and undefiled religion? It is this, *To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*. Not just widows and orphans of course but to use our resources to do what we can to take care of all God's people.

¹⁸ *Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.* ¹⁹ *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.* So let's be thankful to God for the lives He has given us. Let us live modestly, by His grace, in accordance with His Will for us, using the gifts, opportunities and talents He has given to each one of us, to play the part He has given us, to care for one another and to look after one another in these times of crisis.

²⁰ *For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.* Make the most of your time on earth and, when the time comes, be ready to enter the joy of our Lord.