

01-01-21a Ecclesiastes

Let's begin our worship this Sunday morning by spending a few moments in silent prayer to clear our minds and prepare our hearts, seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit as we study God's word together, shall we pray? Father, we thank you for your grace and your faithfulness toward us. We know that we are insufficient in and of ourselves to accomplish anything, to be worth anything, to have any meaning or purpose or definition in our lives, but because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf, because of the ultimate expression of his love and your love at the cross, we have been rescued from oblivion, we have been given purpose, we've been given meaning, our lives have been defined, we have a heavenly calling, we have such great opportunities to redeem the time that is allocated to us in this life and accomplish something that has lasting value. We know that by faith we can reap the harvest of righteousness, that you have called us to go forth and gather, and we pray this morning as we study your word together that God the Holy Spirit will show us the nature and the scope of our opportunities to do so and find those opportunities in the normal, everyday activities of our lives.

We thank you for our nation, we thank you for the government that we have, we thank you for the new president and the new presidency, and for the opportunities for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in that office to preserve our freedoms and to protect our opportunities to live our lives to please you, and we ask your blessing on him, your guidance on him and on his staff, we pray that you will confound those who would try to attack and undermine his efforts for their own political gain, we pray that you will bless our nation as you have in the past so that we can devote our time and our attention to fulfilling the calling that is ours in Christ Jesus, and we ask it in the name of our Savior, amen. For our script reading this morning, in connection with our study in the book of Ecclesiastes, please turn to Hebrews chapter 8. There is nothing more satisfying than to be reading a difficult section of scripture and have somebody say, here's the point, this is the main point of what I'm saying, and we have that in Ecclesiastes this morning and we also have it here in Hebrews. Hebrews of course is a very rich and deep collection of doctrines pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ and his work, not only in the New Testament age but as it was foreshadowed in the old, but at the beginning of chapter 8, the author of Hebrews, who as you know I think was the Apostle Paul, says, now this is the main point of the things we are saying.

I love that. It just brings a smile to my face when you've waded through six or seven chapters of a difficult book and then the author says, look, here's the point. So this is the main point of the things we are saying.

We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. We know that the author of Hebrews has been talking about God's purpose in Christ, the need for a new priesthood because the old was temporary and did not affect permanent redemption, permanent reconciliation. The ritual functions of the Levitical priesthood in the offerings and sacrifices were a shadow.

They were a picture of the reality that would come in Christ. So, we have a high priest, a spiritual high priest, a heavenly high priest, who is the fulfillment of everything that the Levitical high priest and the priesthood that he oversaw, everything that he pictured and symbolized and foreshadowed. We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man.

So, this is the place where actual redemption and reconciliation and propitiation is accomplished. We use those three Asian words a lot. We know what redemption is, purchase out of the slave market being redeemed in the same way that you redeem a coupon that is good for a certain amount of money or is good for an item, a pawn ticket that you take down and retrieve something that has been imprisoned or has been taken away from you in exchange for something.

That's redemption. A price has been paid so that an obligation is fulfilled. There is no longer a debt.

Reconciliation, restoration of relationship or in our case initiation of relationship with God because we are born as aliens and enemies of God without hope, without God in the world. Reconciliation is we are entered into relationship with God the Father through Christ. So, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation means that the legal consequences of our sinfulness and our fallen state have been satisfied.

You can be a criminal who has killed a member of a family and occasionally you see a show on television where someone either as a drunk driver inadvertently or through carelessness or someone who actually has some sort of a problem where they've gone in and killed a member of a family and initially you have all of this anger and desire for revenge and so forth but over the course of time you find that the family actually establishes a relationship with the person who took their loved one away and may minister to them and try to lead them to the Lord or engages in Christian fellowship with them after they come to the Lord or something and it's quite an amazing thing for someone who has been the recipient of a great wrong and a terrible tragedy winds up expressing love toward the person who committed this wrong and when those things are legitimate and done in the power of the Holy Spirit it's a great illustration of the biblical principle. But you can have a restoration of relationship with someone and yet they are still facing legal consequences. You maybe forgive them and see that they've had a change of heart and that they've recognized the error of their ways.

There may be tremendous remorse if it was a manslaughter situation where it was through negligence or carelessness or being under the influence or something that a wrong was committed and the family can reconcile with that person for their own healing and to try to help that person but there are still legal ramifications of the wrong that was committed. There is still a guilt and a penalty that has to be paid in terms of the law and so that's why we have these three separate categories. There needs to be redemption, there needs to be reconciliation and there

needs to be propitiation to have a relationship with God.

These are the things that Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. These are the things that are pictured under three main categories. There are many other facets of Christ's work on the cross that are elucidated and illustrated and brought out as you study the Old Testament rituals of sacrifice and I look forward to the day when we can do that in detail.

But here in Hebrews chapter 8 here is the main point. We have this high priest seated in the heavens at the right hand of the throne of the majesty. He is a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man.

Earthly things are a picture and a window into these heavenly realities. For every high priest and by implication this is the high priest on earth, the Levitical high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this one also have something to offer.

For if he were on earth he would not be a priest since there are already priests who offer the gifts according to the law, who serve the copy and shadow of heavenly things. As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle, God told Moses see that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. But now he, Christ, has obtained a more excellent ministry inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for a second. If the things that God delivered through Moses on Sinai were sufficient, if that was the actual work, the heavenly spiritual work, then Christ would never have needed to come because that would have been the means, the actual animal blood would have been sufficient to erase sin and to restore relationship. But, verse 8, finding fault with them, that is, finding that there is a lack, that there is an insufficiency in their earthly shadows, he says, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

None of them shall teach his neighbor and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. This is looking forward to the days that are going to be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom after the resurrection, after the judgment, after the reckoning of fruit in the life, when the zero fields, the 30-fold, the 60-fold, the 100-fold fields have been gathered.

Who had righteousness by faith? Who fulfilled through faith and obedience the Old Testament calling that was issued to the individuals in the nation of Israel? And in that day when the Lord Jesus Christ is sitting on the throne of his father David in Jerusalem and all of these Old Testament saints have been resurrected and are living on the earth, God will fulfill this new covenant. There's going to be a new opportunity. They are going to get the chance to live the life that we now live because they will get to live with the power of the Spirit and with the power of the Word as we do now, which was not something that was available in the Old Testament age the way that it is now.

Did the Holy Spirit minister? Yes. Was there a Word of God? Yes, but not in the fullness and not in the individual availability that we have it now. So, in that he says a new covenant, he has made the first obsolete.

Now, what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. And one of the important conclusions that we draw, observations that we make in looking at the difference between the age of Israel and the age of the church is that there were limits on what you could do and how far you could go as a believer. The Holy Spirit was not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified.

Salvation in its fullness and in its completion was in prospect. It was future. And before Christ and before his work on the cross, it was anticipation.

In the same way that we anticipate the glory of the kingdom and the glory of life with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father in the two kingdoms that are yet to come, we wait for that. We long for that. Paul says the whole creation groans waiting for the revelation of the sons of God and for all these future things.

Well, think about what it was like before Christ where even the ultimate resolution of sin and the close relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and through the word of God and the fullness of revelation that we have was future. We saw in Luke where Jesus told his followers, he told the disciples in Luke chapter 10, kings and prophets longed to see the things that you see and did not see them. Kings and prophets.

Who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes? A king and a prophet in the sense of a fourth teller of God's word longed to see this day. Longed to see the things that you see and did not see them. There were limits on how far forward they could see.

There were limits on how much they could understand and how much they could experience of fullness of understanding of God's plan and God's purpose because it was far off. Like Balaam says, I see him now but not near. It's a long ways out, this star that's going to arise out of Jacob and smite the brow of Moab.

Moses said there's a prophet that's going to rise up. Job said I know that my redeemer lives and that I will see him from my flesh in the last day. But I don't see him now, I don't experience him now.

It's a far off. And so the fulfillment was distant and remote. And the immediate prospect of death, why is it that death seems so different in the Old Testament than it does in the New? When Paul talks about death, he says we don't grieve as those who have no hope.

Absent from the body, present with the Lord. The ones who have died are going to meet the Lord ahead of us. The dead in Christ shall rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them. So comfort one another with these words. You don't find that idea of comforting people whose loved ones have died in the Old Testament.

What does David do when his young son dies, his infant son, as a result of the discipline because of the murder of Uriah and the adultery with Bathsheba? He grieves, he's distraught. And after the boy dies, he says, well, he can't return to me. I can go to him in the sense, well, I can join him in death, but he's not going to return to me.

And you don't see David comforting himself with, well, I'll... His idea is not so much, well, I'm going to experience life and fellowship and watch him grow up and everything. He just says, well, I'm ultimately going to end up dead just like he is. He's not going to come back to life where I am.

And that's not a very hopeful statement. People have tried to make a lot out of that statement that David says, well, he's thinking of resurrection. He doesn't say anything about resurrection.

He says he can't rejoin the living. I will join the dead. And in that sense, that's as close as he gets to comfort.

But he's very distraught. Why is he so worried about the infant dying and doesn't eat and just is absolutely helpless? Because death is a tragic thing. He doesn't find that, well, it's a temporary separation idea so much.

It's way off in the Old Testament. Here's the point. When you look at the Old Testament perspective, there is a sense in which the more you learn and the more you know, the more you realize that you're trapped in an age where a lot of the plan of God is future and distant and you can't see it.

The kings, the great kings, the prophets to whom God reveals great things like Daniel and Isaiah and Jeremiah run up against the limits of the age in which they live. John the Baptist himself, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, doesn't get to see the fulfillment of what he preached on the banks of the Jordan. The one coming greater than I, whose sandal I'm not worthy to loose,

who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John doesn't see the fulfillment of that. He dies in prison. He's beheaded before the ministry of Jesus Christ reaches its culmination.

All of the Old Testament prophets and kings died not having received the promise, not having seen the fulfillment. And the more they learned, the further along they got. You find your greatest Old Testament saints realizing that they've hit the glass ceiling, so to speak.

There is a point beyond which they cannot go because of the age in which they live and the purposes that God has for that. Now, are they eventually going to break through that glass ceiling? Are they eventually going to find that fulfillment? Of course. That's the beauty of the millennial kingdom.

But they've got to wait because they, without us, cannot be made complete. The church has been intercalated. The church age has been inserted.

And the older brother has to wait while the younger brother receives the inheritance because of faithlessness. That's the pattern you see repeated over and over again in the Old Testament. Why is it Jacob and not Esau? Why is it Isaac and not Ishmael? Why is it Joseph and not Reuben and Judah and Simeon and Levi? Because there is a picture of reversal.

There's a picture of the last being first. But ultimately, all of the brothers are blessed. Esau is a believer.

Ishmael is a believer. The other 11 sons of Jacob are believers. All of the 12 tribes of Israel are going to experience blessing.

But when do all of these individuals come into the great blessing? It's after their resurrection because in this life they were set aside and someone younger but more faithful took their place. The two generations of Israel, the first generation that dropped in the wilderness, the second generation that went into the land, the elder shall serve the younger. It is the generation who by faith can cross the Jordan that experiences the milk and honey and the victories in the land.

And the other generation who by rights should have gone in, who was first to receive the promise, dropped in the wilderness because they lacked the faith and the obedience. Well, you have a remnant in every generation in Old Testament Israel who does have the faith, who does see and respond to the calling of God. But they're in a nation and God is dealing with Israel on a national basis.

And while He preserves and blesses and sustains and gives that measure of grace, there is a point beyond which they can't go because they're in the Old Testament age. They're in the nation of Israel. And the ultimate fulfillment of many of these promises is yet future.

Even old Simeon who sees the hope of Israel in one of the last days of his life when he's down there at the temple and holds the infant Jesus in his arms, doesn't see the fulfillment. Do we really think Simeon lived another 30 years to see the victory on the cross? Probably not. But he sees it in its incipient form.

He sees the potential. And that's as far as he gets. Same with Anna and a lot of the others who had been waiting for the redemption of Israel.

Even when they hear about the birth, those shepherds, who knows how old they were or how many were left 33 years later when the Lord Jesus Christ goes to the cross. Do they see Pentecost? Do they see the coming of the church age? Probably not. All these died in faith, not having received the promise it tells us in Hebrews 11.

Well, what do you think the perspective is going to be of the greatest and wisest Old Testament believer, the one who has the fullest understanding of all of God's wisdom and all of God's knowledge in the Old Testament? Who is that individual, by the way? It's Solomon, who wrote Ecclesiastes. So what is going to be his perspective as he looks around and he can reap as he perceives nature and animals and trees and all of the things that chapter 12 tells us he commented on and observed? All of the wisdom that he sees. And as he looks at life and at the purpose of life and the meaning of life and the attainments, the labors, whether you're small or great, whether you're rich or poor, as you use up the allocation of days that God gives you, do you think that Solomon is going to really hit that glass ceiling hard? I think so.

And Ecclesiastes is the book that expresses that realization. It is not pessimistic. It is not bitter, as so many have painted this book.

But it recognizes that there is a limit. And that's what we're going to see this morning. And we find in the unfolding revelation in the New Testament, especially through the Apostle Paul, especially in the book of Hebrews, looking back at the limitations of the Old Testament age and rejoicing in the freedom and the progress that is ours in Christ.

We are no longer limited to the shadows and the foreshadowing. Now we have the reality. Jesus told his disciples, It's good that I leave and the Holy Spirit come.

It is to your advantage because it is a step forward. You have a freedom and you have a potential that was not in existence in the Old Testament age. Well, there is no one in the Old Testament age that is going to be more aware of where the line is drawn and where you have to stop.

It's like Moses on Mount Pisgah, looking across and seeing, but not being able to enter the land of promise. It doesn't mean that you're bitter and it doesn't mean that you're pessimistic, but you sure can look from Pisgah's lofty height across and long and wish for the things you see on the other side. Moses is ultimately going to be on the other side of the Jordan, isn't he? He was there briefly at the Mount of Transfiguration.

That's on the good side of the Jordan. And for those few minutes that he conversed with the Lord and with Elijah at Transfiguration, he got across the Jordan and he's got a foretaste of glory divine. But he's going to have a thousand years to live in the land of promise with the greatest king that Israel will ever see, David's greater son.

Would you rather live in the land in the days of the judges and Joshua or would you rather live for a thousand years under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ? There is a sense in which Moses has the better part and so do all the people of faith who hit the wall, who reached the limit of what you could do and understand in the Old Testament. It's the same way we feel now. I think all of us have looked at the Scriptures and you can tell that there's something there that we can't quite grasp.

We learn things but we can't seem to remember them. We are struck by them at the time but we hold this treasure in earthen vessels and earthen vessels have cracks and we lose it. We can't seem to keep it all in the front of our minds.

We get glimpses, we get foretastes of glory divine but it's impermanent because we are flawed and we are human and we are limited and we need constant refreshment. We need constant reminding and revisiting of things. You remember the experience that you've had, as I have had, where you come to a Scripture and all of a sudden you say, oh yes, I remember this, we've studied this before, how could I have forgotten that? As we go back now to Ecclesiastes 1. You'll remember from our introduction that this is a much misunderstood book.

It is a variously interpreted book. Let me just read you the introduction from the New Schofield. If I had to pick a most precious possession, if there was one thing that I thought I would want to take with me into the millennial kingdom out of all of this earthly treasure, it is this Bible.

This is the Bible I was given when I graduated from high school. All of my grandparents and my parents, I say all of my grandparents because I've got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven of them who signed the front of my Bible. I won't tell you why I have that many, but I do.

And my mother and father signed it and each of the people who signed my Bible in the front put a scripture with it and gave this to me in Christmas 1974 just before I left home and launched my career. I did hundreds, probably thousands of hours of studying in this book. It's marked up from cover to cover.

But it's a New Schofield. It's also a loose leaf which is handy because I can put note pages in it. But it's a New Schofield and I really like it a lot.

The language is a little bit difficult in places which is why we study from the New King James. But this is my favorite Bible. This is the one thing I would rush into a burning house to retrieve assuming the family was out.

And even then I would probably hand one of them the Bible and drag them out. Here is what the introduction to Ecclesiastes says in the New Schofield. Ecclesiastes, the title, is taken from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament and is a rendition of the Hebrew word kohelet.

It implies that the author is a teacher or preacher. In good part, autobiographical, Ecclesiastes reflects those experiences of Solomon, the preacher, king in Jerusalem. Chapter 1, verse 1, which corroborates his theme, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

By vanity, Solomon means that which is empty, without permanent value, that which leads to frustration. So, in the view of the editors of the New Schofield, and probably Schofield, I haven't looked to see if the Old Schofield says the same thing, the idea of vanity of vanities is that it is something frustrating. And, of course, the English translation, vanity itself, has the idea of something that is pointless, something that is a waste of time.

If you look at the history of interpretation, which we've reviewed sort of briefly, one thing most commentators agree on is that this phrase in verse 2 of chapter 1, of course, we've already covered verse 1, the words of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. We know that this identifies Solomon, and not just identifies him, he could have just said the words of Solomon. But when he says Kohelet, we talked about the one who is trying to rally the people of faith.

Kahal is a verb that is used of gathering people, not objects, not proverbs, not wisdom. It is a feminine participle meaning that it's an office or a function, rather than an actual name. Do you remember Solomon's other name? What was the name that God gave Solomon? Do you remember? Jedidiah.

He doesn't say the words of Jedidiah. He doesn't say the words of Shlomo. He says Kohelet because he is presenting himself in a particular role or function.

He's fulfilling an office. The feminine participle came to be used at times for an office or a function. So what is he doing? He's assembling, he's gathering people, and it's a particular kind of people.

It's not people like he assembles them at the dedication of the temple. These are people who are going to hear the voice of wisdom. These are people who are asking and seeking and knocking.

So he says, if you want to come together for the real worship, the spiritual worship, if you want to find out just how much we can know and how far we can go in the Old Testament age, then pay attention because these are the words of the worship assembler. These are the words of not only Kohelet, but the son of David, king in Jerusalem, someone who is worth listening to, someone who has authority, someone who has been there and done that, so to speak, in the Old Testament age. But then in verse 2, our English says, Vanity of vanities, says the preacher.

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. This is quite a remarkable verse because you have the word vanity

repeated five times in the space of a single verse. It's hard to even construct a sentence where you can repeat the same word five times.

But that's what happens here. And you'll notice in your New King James, what is the footnote, the little number one there on the first vanity? Absurdity, frustration, futility, nonsense. And so throughout this book.

Well, this word translated vanity is used about 38 times in the space of 12 chapters. So it would be important, I mean, understanding the meaning of this word, this is going to condition our understanding of the whole book. And you know from your past experience with this book that there are a lot of refrains, like verse 14 of chapter 1. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and indeed all is vanity and a grasping for the wind.

The Old King James says vexation of spirit there. Well, from a superficial look, we would say, well, this certainly sounds pessimistic to me. Futility of futilities, all is futile.

It's like the Borg on Star Trek, resistance is futile. You will be assimilated. Look at any of those substitutes that are given in the footnote in the New King James.

Absurdity of absurdities, frustration of frustrations, futility of futilities, nonsense of nonsenses. Well, none of these is very uplifting, none of these is very optimistic, is it? So the point is, it is critically important for us to understand what this word means. In Hebrew, it is the word hevel.

The best transliteration, I guess, would be H-E-B-E-L. The B is actually a soft B. There are two kinds of Bs in Hebrew, one without a little dot in the middle and one with. I won't give you all the Hebrew terms, talking about dogishes and dogish forte and so forth.

But basically, in a word like this, the B is soft and it's more like a V, as in German. So you would say hevel. I may pronounce it both ways, but that's the reason.

When you double it or make it a hard B, then it has the labial, using your lips to make it. But otherwise, it's more... I saw a lady, this has nothing to do with anything, but I saw a lady being interviewed yesterday on TV. They were talking about a time back in 1949 in Florida where three black youths were charged with a crime.

I didn't watch the whole thing, but it struck me because there was a lady who was young and who lived in the area at the time and a lot of the black people had to leave because there were lynchings and all kinds of bad things going on. They burned down entire neighborhoods of houses of black people. So they were interviewing this lady and she was... If you've ever seen ladies who they interview in later life, but you can tell what they probably looked like when they were young.

There are still traces of what they looked like when they were young, but they're older. But this lady, even though she was talking about these tragic things, you could tell that she was basically

sort of an optimistic or cheerful lady. But the thing that struck me as I watched her talking, and I actually had the sound down and had to listen closely to even hear, but she was an older lady, but well-preserved black lady, and she had a beautiful smile, nice, shiny, even white teeth.

But as she talked, her upper lip never touched her lower lip. Well, what do you do when you get to an M or a B, which are what labials they call them when you talk about language, letters or sounds that are formed by putting your lips together. P and M and B and so forth, it's when you put your lips together.

This lady's lips never came together. I looked at her and these beautiful white teeth were showing all the time, and they were her teeth. But I was listening closely because I wondered, well, what does she sound like when her lips never come together? Well, she did everything with the edges of her teeth, and her M's and B's and P's were done when her lower lip contacted the bottom of her teeth.

I don't know what that has to do with anything, but we're talking about Hevel here, and it's a B that you make when your lower lip hits your teeth rather than your upper lip. This is common. I could go on and on about Hebrew, but you can stress or not stress a consonant in that way.

There are several other letters that can either be soft or hard, but B is one of them, so it's Hevel or Hebel, depending on how you want to pronounce it, but it's a soft sound. The reason I say that is there's a little bit of onomatopoeia in this word. You know what onomatopoeia is? Onoma is name, and poeia is making or doing something, and it means that the sound of the word imitates the concept that the word represents.

Sometimes you have words that have lots of S's, and it connotes something. Well, the sound of the word Hevel, Hevel, it's a breathy sort of a word. You don't have any hard consonants in it.

Hevel. And this is the root meaning of the word. It means a breath, an ephemeral puff of wind.

You can find parallels to this, which we'll go to directly. We'll see some of the uses of Hevel when we come back from the break. But Hevel means a puff of wind.

It doesn't have in and of itself any negative freight. And most interesting, and I sort of teased you with this last time, this is the name of the son of Adam and Eve who was killed by Cain. Abel, his name is Hevel.

And the idea, I think, when Adam named his son, what characterizes the birth or the coming into the world of Adam? God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life or lives, neshama. And so there is a breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. Man became a living soul.

Well, when Adam has a son, and he is alive, and comes into the world and starts breathing,

comes out of the womb and starts breathing, and Adam is thinking about this breath and life and so forth, he names him Hevel, breath. He's got the breath, he's got the life. But interestingly, Abel's life is cut short.

It doesn't come to its fulfillment and completion. He doesn't get three score and ten. It's interrupted, and he seems like a very temporary individual.

He was a temporary individual. He's here a little while, he's the victim of the first murder. The first unnaturally terminated life.

The first death in scripture. The first physical death is not Eve and not Adam, it's Abel. He's the first human being to experience physical death.

Well, what a wonderfully rich word for Solomon to use to introduce the theme of his book, because verse 2 is the thematic statement. Remember I talked about Hebrews chapter 8 verse 1? Now this is the point of what I am saying? Well, Solomon doesn't wait 20 something chapters like John does to say, this is the reason I'm writing these things, that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and believing you might have life through his name. Remember John does that toward the end of his gospel.

Well, Solomon puts his theme statement right at the beginning of this work. He introduces himself, and then he says, this is what I want to talk about. Hevel, Hevelim.

Remember, Im is the plural, just like Shemayim is the heavens, Mayim is the waters. It's actually a dual. And again, I won't go into all the details of Hebrew, but the dual comes to be used for the plural.

And Nephilim, the ones who fell, Im makes many words in Hebrew plural. Well here, Hevel is made plural by putting Im on the end. Hevel, Hevelim.

And this is where you get the translation, vanity of vanities. But this doubling is used as a superlative. The easiest way I can illustrate this for you is to remind you of some New Testament equivalents.

What is one of the greatest titles of the Lord Jesus Christ? King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Remember in the Hallelujah Chorus? When you get to that part of the thing, I don't think any thinking believer can listen to the Hallelujah Chorus when it gets to that part and they sing King of Kings and Lord of Lords without getting choked up. It's just an amazing expression of who the Lord Jesus Christ is.

But it is a superlative. He is the ultimate King. He is the ultimate Lord.

He is the highest King, the highest Lord. And that is the sense of the dual here, or the doubling, the singular followed by the plural. So if we wanted to try to render this into English in a

meaningful way, what could we say? Well, it is the ultimate Hevel.

It is the Hevel of Hevels. And Hevel, we need to shake loose for the moment. Just trust me on this.

Get rid of the idea of vanity, absurdity, frustration, futility and nonsense because these are interpretive translations. Let's try to get back and take a fresh, let's just start with a blank sheet and look at what Hevel connotes. It is something temporary.

It is something brief, ephemeral, if you will, something impermanent, even able. He is the symbol of impermanence, the first one to have his life snuffed out. He lived and then he died and he was no more.

So if I were going to translate this, and how I am going to translate it for the purpose of our study, is impermanence. Because this is a metaphor. It is using a literal thing, which is the literal meaning of Hevel is a puff of wind or a breath.

But to say breath of breaths or puff of puffs doesn't work in English the way it does in Hebrew. So we have to go ahead and translate the metaphor, if you will. And to translate the metaphor, we need to think just a minute about metaphors.

When you use a metaphor, there are some things that match and some things that don't. I saw a good illustration. There was a lady that wrote an article on Ecclesiastes 1.2. She was talking about metaphors as well.

She said there is a piece of poetry that somebody wrote about a fog creeping in on little tiny cat feet. Well, there are certain things about a fog creeping in that remind you of a cat. And what are those things? Where is the intersection of cat feet and a fog? Well, stealthy, silent, there before you know it kind of a thing.

But there are other things about a fog and a cat that don't match. You don't expect, and this is what the lady said, you don't expect to find little paw prints on the ground after a fog has come in. And I could add to that.

You're not going to find cat droppings. You're not going to hear meows. You're not going to have cat hair all over your clothes after a fog comes in.

There are certain similarities between a cat or cat feet and a fog that are in view when the metaphor is used. And there are other things that are not in view. So when you have a metaphor, what you have to do is find out when a person uses this metaphor, what are the points of similarity that they have in mind and what are the ones that you can safely exclude? Because a fog and a cat are not exactly alike in every respect.

It's the intersection of those. It's the common things, the part that one suggests the other, the

stealth, the quietness, the there-before-you-know-it aspect. It's very suggested because you think, I constantly look up and here's the cat staring at me, and I didn't even realize she was there.

They're stealthy, they're quiet. And a fog can do the same thing. Suddenly people out in boats that get lost at sea all the time talk about, oh, the fog was just there before we knew it.

One minute it was a bright, shiny day. The next minute we were in fog and couldn't see our hand in front of our face. Well, heathel here, this puff or breath, is a metaphor.

So what we want to find out is, what is it about a breath or puff of wind that is in view when Solomon uses this metaphor? And we have to think about the characteristics of a puff or breath of wind. What is it? Well, it's invisible. It is temporary.

You have ruach, which is used for a wind. You go to Jonah and it says that God hurled a ruach into the water and stirred up this great tempest and this great storm and ruach is used for spirit. It's used for wind in the Old Testament.

Well, wind is a force and you have the idea of constancy. It's blowing. It's exerting force.

It stirs up the waters. Ruach has a different nuance than heathel. Heathel, just even by its sound, it's just a little puff.

It's a breath. It's something very impermanent. A little puff of wind as opposed to a giant forceful wind.

And so we're going to see in context what works best, what to take from this metaphor, but I'm going to suggest to you in advance that it is the idea of impermanence. Look at Abel. We don't have the idea of frustration or absurdity or futility in the life of Abel.

Abel was a tremendous believer. He brought sacrifice to God. He worshipped in the right way and was approved by God.

And his blood cried out to God from the ground. So he wasn't absurd or futile or nonsensical or any of these other translations that are suggested for heathel. But what is striking about Abel and about heathel, it's impermanent.

What is it about heathel, heatheline that we should bring from that metaphor? It's the idea of transitoriness, impermanence. And when it's doubled this way and you have the superlative idea, such as king of kings or lord of lords, he says heatheline. Well, it is the ultimate impermanence, the ultimate intransitory, if you will.

It's real difficult to render this into English, which is why you have so many different translations. I looked at even the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible in their English translation, and they say frustration

of frustrations. Berkeley and a lot of others have this translated as frustration.

But I don't think that is the right thing to bring from heathel in terms of metaphor. It is the transitory, impermanent, momentary nature, the brevity, the impermanence. And we're going to find this borne out as we go into this section, verses 3 through 11, where Solomon is going to talk about the course of life, the nature of things in this world, the nature of things under the sun.

And you know from having read these verses in the past, when he talks about the cyclical nature, one generation comes and goes, the wind blows and returns, the sun shines and returns, all things go in a cyclical nature. And there is no suggestion in verses 3 through 11 of absurdity or of uselessness. The idea is that everything gets reset.

There is nothing worse than working for a long time on something on the computer, and then the computer resets, and you're back where you started at the beginning of the day. I had somebody call me this past week, oh I worked for this thing for six hours, Excel spreadsheet, oh I saved wrong, or my machine went out or something, now it's gone. Well, you're back to the beginning, you're back where you started, and all that labor and all that work has just disappeared.

And it's the idea of reset, everything you did was temporary and transitory. Can there be an element of frustration? Well, possibly, but we don't want to start with that, because Solomon doesn't start with it. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

Again, I don't like to stop at the end of a lesson without having something to chew on, in case you only get to, if you have to stop at this point, and what would you think about? What we've seen here is God does have a plan. He assigns people a place. You think about the Old Testament believers.

Was their life futile, because they were in the Old Testament age, and there were limits to how far they could go, and how much they could see? Was it a waste of time to be an Old Testament saint? Not at all. But their role in God's plan was impermanent and temporary. The things that they worked through, the challenges that they faced, the tests of their faith, the function that they fulfilled in God's plan, that's not the end and the fulfillment of God's plan.

It was an anticipation. It was a looking forward to something more permanent. And it wasn't a waste of time.

It wasn't absurd. It wasn't futile. It wasn't frustration.

It wasn't nonsense. And in the same way that you look at Hebrews chapter 8, and indeed the whole book of Hebrews, and the argument that these things were necessary, but they were temporary. There was a temporary covenant with Israel.

There was a high priesthood that had to be refreshed time and again because the high priest died, and you had to get another one. The sacrifices were offered year by year because the effect

didn't last. Well, it doesn't mean that it was a waste of time to fulfill the Mosaic Law or to offer those sacrifices, but that was a phase in God's plan, and it was designed to teach a certain point.

There are many things about this life that don't last. You think, you know, I washed the dishes yesterday. I've got to wash them again today.

I washed the laundry last week. I've got to wash it again this week. There are so many things that have to repeat, even studying the Word of God.

You think, you know, I wish I could retain and keep in the forefront of my mind everything I've ever learned, but we constantly have to go back and refresh because the nature of this life is impermanent and temporary. Well, there are things that we can learn. There are things that we can draw from that, and Solomon is going to talk about that aspect of life in this section of Ecclesiastes, and it's not a waste of time.

And so we shouldn't start the book thinking, well, vanity of vanities, all is vanity, a waste of time, and that this is some sort of an unbelieving human viewpoint and that he's a pessimist and that he's frustrated. That's not what's in view. We recognize that there is an impermanence, that there is a temporary quality to a lot of things in life.

What are we to think? How are we to adjust to that? How are we to function in that life? Well, this is going to be very helpful information, and that's what we're going to glean out of this, one of the many things we're going to glean out of Ecclesiastes. So, many times we can look at something and we don't see the point. We don't see where it had any lasting effect.

We don't see where it made a difference. You can speak the truth to someone in love, and it doesn't seem to have had an effect. You can operate in faith, and you can be obedient, and you can be patient, and you can produce the fruit of the Spirit, but you don't see any effect, and you think, you know, I did that yesterday, but here today I failed, and one day I succeed, and another day I fail.

Does it really make any difference? Well, part of our faith is, yes, it does make a difference. Yes, there is a value. Don't think that because something is impermanent, or because something is temporary, that it's a waste of time.

It's such a tragedy that this book of Ecclesiastes has been turned on its head. The very thing Solomon is arguing against is what has been attributed to the book. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, says Kohelet.

That's exactly what he is not saying. It's the opposite of what he's saying. He is bringing up this issue of impermanence so that we can learn how to deal with it, so that we can find the lasting value, and it's just the opposite.

So we need to have optimism. We need to have faith, not pessimism, and thinking, well, because things are impermanent, they're worthless. That's not the case.

Well, we'll come back and explore this in more detail after the break, but let's pause at this point.