

01-03-18a Ecclesiastes

I just wanted to mention briefly the summary, the Tate Ministry Financial Summary for last year that you have a copy of there. And it is always encouraging to know that there are those who benefit and follow along with us in the studies and the worship that we participate in here. And in the same way when I was in New Orleans last week and got the chance to attend a really wonderful church with a good teaching pastor and people who were interested.

It's one thing to imagine and to know theoretically that there are others who are of like mind and who recognize what the Christian calling is and what the means and the structure of the Christian life is all about. But it is always particularly encouraging to actually see those people and to hear about them, to hear from them and to know that we're not just a small, tiny, strange little group off in the shadows someplace. There are many, many believers who are walking that narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life.

And we are just one small group that represents that much larger 7,000, if you will, that may not be immediately visible but have not bowed the knee to Baal, haven't been distracted, haven't been led down the path. And so I commend this to your attention not only for the numbers that are on it but also as a reminder that we are the recipients of the prayer ministry of many of the folks who follow along on tapes. We are fellow laborers with them in God's field as we seek to bear fruit and we have a fellowship that goes beyond the visible boundaries of our local assembly here.

And it's always encouraging to me to know that there are not only those of us here but also others who appreciate and participate and pray and contribute and in every way except their physical presence are in fellowship with us. Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Proverbs 13, 13th chapter of Proverbs. This is a fascinating chapter particularly as it relates to our study in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2 and moving into chapter 3. The chapter 13 of Proverbs, you know how the Proverbs are, you go over to Proverbs and if you're going to memorize Proverbs, you don't memorize big chunks, you just take a verse or two because these are, as people like to characterize it, pithy sayings, little summaries of wisdom, little gems sort of scattered in the drawer.

You open a drawer, until lately the girls did a great job of cleaning up our, I think everybody has a sort of a tool drawer or junk drawer, we don't like to say junk drawer though, but it's a drawer where all the little flotsam and jetsam that you need like cup hooks and pair of pliers and rubber bands and tacks and just stuff, little hardware repository. Most of the time when you open a drawer like that, it's just everything in there is useful at some time or another, twist ties, little clear suction cups with hooks on them and all kinds of little strange things that you may not need for months and months, but when you need it, you know where to go. You go to that drawer and pull it open, but typically that stuff is just all kind of thrown in there.

You root around looking for that particular size of Phillips screwdriver or that particular little round wooden plug somebody found on the floor and you couldn't figure out where it came from and suddenly weeks later you say, oh look, there's a plug missing out of the back of this chair. You go to the drawer, dig around, dig around, you eventually find it. Everything is valuable, but it's not particularly organized.

Well, that's usually our view of Proverbs is that all of these are inspired by God and all, but it doesn't seem to have a particular organization. Well, I will give you a clue that there is organization in this section of Proverbs that we call chapter 13 and you can watch for it as we read it and then I'll try to commit it to your attention when we finish. Proverbs 13, a wise son heeds his father's instruction.

I would just put this on the refrigerator in every household that has children. This is a wise child. It could be a son or a daughter.

A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. Doesn't mean he doesn't get rebuked. He doesn't listen to rebuke.

A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. Probably put that one on the refrigerator right next to the first one.

The soul of a lazy man desires and has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame. Righteousness guards him whose way is blameless, but wickedness overthrows the sinner.

There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing, and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor does not hear rebuke. The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

That was one of our summer camp memory verses back when I was a junior high school age. I always wondered, well, the light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out. Is that his life? Is that his ability to perceive? What exactly is it? And why would one rejoice and the other be put out? Obviously, it would be fun to do an exegesis of each of these verses.

Some of them are more clear than others when they get rendered into English, because there are puns, there are figures of speech, there are clever word plays in these Proverbs that make them memorable, that make them stick in the mind, just like we have in English. Some of our wisdom sayings, but a lot of that gets lost. Verse 10, by pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well advised is wisdom.

Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life. He who despises the

word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.

The law of the wise is a fountain of life to turn one away from the snares of death. Good understanding gains favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard. One of my great grandmothers, her generation had a saying, you know, we've heard more recently people say, well, life is hard and then you die, but back then they used to say, well, it's, my great grandmother used to say, well, it's a great life if you don't weaken.

And, you know, people felt that, you know, a lot of life was just one strenuous test after another. But a lot of times it's because we're walking in the way of the unfaithful, and that's one of the things that makes life hard. Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool lays open his folly.

A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings health. Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards a rebuke will be honored. A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul, but it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil.

He who walks with the wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid. A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, and for lack of justice there is waste. He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. This is part of the problems with our criminal justice system.

You see these things where somebody gets convicted of a crime, they may be sentenced to death, and then they're on death row 11 years, 15 years, 20 years, 25 years. The sloth and the complete lack of urgency in our justice system violates this biblical principle. If discipline is going to work, it has to be administered promptly.

The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the stomach of the wicked shall be in want. Do you notice that nearly all of these verses in Proverbs 13 give you a contrast? Many times we have a two-line proverb that talks about the same thing from two different points of view, but these are all contrasts, virtually all of them are contrasts. You have the wise son contrasted with the scoffer in verse 1. The one who has fruit from his mouth will eat well, but the soul of the unfaithful is going to feed on violence in verse 2. The one who guards his mouth in verse 3 is contrasted with the one who opens wide his lips, just lets anything out, doesn't think before they speak.

Verse 4, you have the diligent and the lazy contrasted. Verse 5, you have the righteous and the wicked. Verse 6, you have the blameless man and the sinner.

Verse 7, you have one who makes himself rich and ends up with nothing. You have another who makes himself poor and has great riches. It goes back to that saying, why labor for that which you

cannot keep? It would be better to look for that which you cannot lose.

Verse 8, you have the rich and the poor. The rich man is going to ransom his life. The poor man is not going to hear rebuke.

This is talking about more than just physical possessions. Verse 9, you have the righteous with a rejoicing light and the wicked with his extinguished lamp. Verse 10, you have the prudent contrasted with the proud.

Verse 11, we'll come back to verse 11, but you have someone gaining through dishonesty contrasted with someone who gains by labor. We'll come back, there's a little bit more to that than meets the eye. And then you have deferred hope contrasted with a fulfilled desire in verse 12.

One who fears the commandment contrasted with one who despises the word in verse 13. So you get the idea, you can look at almost all of these verses and you have the fork in the road. Are you going to choose to be righteous or wicked? Are you going to be prudent or foolish? Are you going to be proud or prudent? Are you going to be rich in the things of God or are you going to be poor? You have the wicked messenger contrasted with the faithful ambassador in verse 17.

Just as you had the prudent and the fool in 16 and the good understanding versus faithlessness in verse 15. You go to verse 19, you have another desire accomplished, being sweet to the soul but fools to them. It's just as much an abomination to depart from their foolishness or their evil as it would be for a righteous person to depart from righteousness, to be an abomination.

Verse 20, walk with the wise, you'll be wise. Be a companion to fools, you're going to be destroyed along with them. Sinners are pursued by evil, the righteous have good repaid to them.

Jesus taught that principle to the disciples. You may have abandoned things in this life but you'll have a hundredfold in the next. A good man leaves an inheritance, the sinner's wealth is going to go to the righteous.

It's not going to go to his descendants and so forth. So you have these contrasts in virtually all of this chapter. Right in the center though of this chapter you have, and you may have noticed I skipped over verse 14, because unlike virtually every other verse in this chapter, it doesn't present a contrast.

It's pretty much right in the middle. You've got 13 verses before it, you've got 12 verses after it. The law of the wise is a fountain of life to turn one away from the snares of death.

And almost everything else in this chapter is summarized. The righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fool, the prudent and the proud, the rich and the poor in terms of spiritual things, the one who labors by dishonesty, the one who gathers by honest labor. All of these things are summarized in this central point.

The law of the wise or to the wise, the law that the wise has and holds, the law that he possesses, that's a fountain of life. And it turns him away from the snares of death. And this, of course, is talking about something far more than just physical death.

It is non-productiveness, fruitlessness, nothing that lasts, nothing that's permanent, nothing that reflects the glory of God. And all of these others are like concentric circles around that main point and giving different shades and illustrations of meaning. And we're going to see this idea of inheritance that's expressed in verse 22 in our Ecclesiastes passage.

We've already seen it in the closing portion of chapter 2 in Ecclesiastes. We're also going to see some vocabulary from verse 11 show up on our passage a little bit later. But what is the substance of this collection of Proverbs in chapter 13? There is a choice.

One thing is better than another in the long term. It is better to be righteous than wicked. It is better to be prudent than to be proud.

It is better to be honest than to be dishonest. It is better to be faithful than faithless. It is better to be lawful than lawless.

It is better to be diligent than to be lazy. It is better to discipline one's son than to spare the rod. It is better to eat in order to satisfy the soul, verse 25, rather than the desires represented by the stomach.

To try to satisfy your own desires, the stomach, the flesh, instead of the soul. The righteous is going to eat in order to satisfy his soul. The wicked is going to try to satisfy his stomach and he's going to be in want.

So, there is a way that leads to that which is righteous, that is permanent, that is lasting. There is a way that leads to death. This is one of the things, and by death I mean non-productiveness, fruitlessness, nothing lasting, nothing of eternal value.

This is a principle that we try to inculcate into children. We've had another collection of school shootings this past week or two. There were two in the same school district out in California.

And people are just wringing their hands and there's analysts and talking heads and all kinds of people trying to figure out what has happened to society that this takes place. They're trying to pass gun laws. I find it very amusing because this last little incident where the guy took a shotgun and a pistol to school and he's such a bad shot that he was aiming for the vice principal and he hit five other people and didn't touch the vice principal.

And you've heard all of the hue and cry for background checks and restrictions on guns and trigger locks and everything else. Well, these guns came from home. They were legal, they were registered, they were legitimate, everything was fine.

So, all of these laws do completely no good because this is like trying to bind the demoniac. The guy that's living in the graves and the caves and they try to bind him and they try to shackle him but he wears away the bonds and he shatters the shackles. You remember that when we studied over in Mark, when Jesus went across the sea.

And those human measures, trying to bind the demon-possessed, is never going to work. Trying to contain wickedness with human measures is never going to work. It's a soul problem.

What is the problem in the soul? We have had a series of generations of children, really beginning after World War II and just getting progressively worse and worse, where we don't want them to encounter difficulty. You had, in earlier days, with our agricultural-based economy, in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, the steel industry, the coal mining industry and all these others, everybody was earning their bread by the sweat of their brow. There was a work ethic.

Everybody knew that life was hard and that you'd better get used to it. Children worked in the home. They worked at an early age and everybody says, well, sweatshops and child labor laws and all that.

You don't want to be approving abuse. But there was a principle. There was a strong work ethic.

And people didn't mind inflicting hardship on their children because they knew that that's the way life is. Life is difficult. You'd better get used to coping with difficulties.

You'd better develop some toughness, some intestinal fortitude. You'd better learn how to endure and to persevere and to persist. Well, you had the generation that went through the Depression that understood that very well and children who worked and contributed to trying to get their family through those tough years.

Then you had World War II and everybody went overseas. We came back. We had a boom economy.

There was all this unbridled prosperity. And people got the idea, I don't want my children to suffer through what I suffered through because that was just very unpleasant. And instead of looking at the fruit of it and the result of it, they looked at the pain of it and the unpleasantness of it.

The Bible says no discipline is a happy experience while it's going on, but it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Well, we lost that perspective. And so in the late 50s and into the 60s and into the 70s, what happened? Our entire society has degenerated.

And this is the beginning of high rates of teen pregnancy. This is the beginning of drug abuse. This is the beginning of people experimenting and looking for pleasure because they haven't been inculcated with a view of life that says you need to figure out how to cope with pressure without sublimating, without flying off into some escapism, without going in for entertainment, without having a Walkman on your belt and a stereo in your room and a TV on at all times and

going to the mall with your friends and all these other things to escape, to get away, to no longer learn to cope with that which is not pleasant.

And so now you have people who are never confronted. I say never in the general sense. Very little by way of experience in coping with confrontation, with the fact that they failed or with the fact that something is wrong or that something didn't go well or they didn't get their way and it couldn't be helped.

And they've got no coping mechanisms. So what do they do? Well, they just go with whatever flies into their head. They see wrestling, WWF on TV, and so they start banging people with chairs and they throw things and they yell and they stomp and they have fits and they feel like they have the right to express themselves because what has happened to the universe that things aren't my way.

And so you have somebody in high school who's disenchanted and nobody's paying attention to them. They don't feel like they're getting what they deserve and so they start bringing weapons or they commit other forms of violence. It's not just the shootings.

That's really the tip of the iceberg. You look at the violence where in some of the city schools they're putting a chain-link fence between the teachers and the students. They've got metal detectors on every door and they're constantly confiscating knives and explosives and drugs and all other kinds of things because this approach to training and preparation for life has been completely abandoned.

There is no discipline, prompt discipline, consequences for action, holding accountable, holding to a standard, even though it's hard, even though it's difficult, even though it's not pleasant. And so when people look around and say, oh, and they're wringing their hands and looking all around saying, we need laws or we need counseling and then every time there's a shooting they send in a whole platoon of counselors. What kind of evil madness is that? What sort of nonsense are they pumping into people's heads? Oh, well, it's right for you to feel your grief and this and that.

Get over it. It's not any different having a violent act in school than it is having somebody get run over by a car or hit by a drunk driver or any of the other things that happen in life. And if children had been given the ability to cope, self-control, a foundation of wisdom, then when a trauma takes place at school they wouldn't go all to pieces.

But now if somebody has a heart attack or there's a bus accident they send in a platoon of counselors and, well, we know that you don't have the ability to cope with this so we're going to send in all of these helpers. Do you think that a platoon of helpers is going to descend every time you have a trauma, every time you have a grief, every time something doesn't go as expected, anything that puts a hole in the bed of roses? Oh, well, let's get the counselors. Let's bring in the grief counselors and all of these others.

It is so sad. It is a symptom of the fact that we are not raising generations of young people who are self-sufficient and self-sustaining, who can think for themselves, who can comfort themselves, who can encourage themselves, who can have objectivity, and who can think their way out of a wet paper bag. We've got to send in groups of people to think for them.

We've got to come up with laws to protect them and metal detectors to take stuff away from them. Per capita there were more weapons in the United States in earlier generations than there are now. Why is it that we suddenly have people popping each other with weapons all the time? It's not the proliferation of weapons.

It's the proliferation of weak, insipid souls. So there is a choice to be made. We have choices as parents.

We have choices as society. We have choices as voters and as people who help determine who gets into government and what the policies are going to be as to what our goal is. Are we trying to have a goal of satisfying the stomach, something that tastes sweet, something that is pleasant? We've got this huge dietary problem and everybody's trying to figure out, well, why do we have the health problems and the weight problems and everything else that we have in society today? And yet you look at what do the fast food restaurants serve up? They serve up things that taste good, it's quick, it's easy, it's convenient, but it has no nutritive value.

Heaven help you if you have to take a trip and live out of these chain restaurants because it doesn't always taste that bad, but you wind up realizing that your digestion is doing strange things and you don't get any real nourishment out of it because it's just pathetic food. Well, we make a choice. Are we looking at the long term or not? And this is the reason I'm sort of dwelling on this is because this is what Ecclesiastes is about.

Are you going to look beyond the moment? Are you going to look beyond the immediate? Here's Solomon over in Ecclesiastes. We got to chapter 2 and he said, I've got to find out where the substance, where the meat of life under the sun is. Where is something that doesn't disappear into the vapor? Vapor may be pleasant.

Clouds are beautiful. Clouds are what make great sunsets, but clouds are ephemeral. They're ethereal.

They are a vapor and they don't last. You know, God didn't create one absolutely stunning sunset and just leave it hanging in the sky day after day after day. So Solomon says, well, I'm going to check out pleasure.

Is there something substantial in pleasure? Does it build up, you know, laughter doeth good like a medicine and all that? So I'm going to test my heart with mirth and pleasure. And he says this didn't work out. Laughter is, we said it wasn't madness so much as pointless.

Makes no sense. Mirth doesn't accomplish anything. So I thought, well, I'll gratify my flesh with wine and guide my heart with wisdom.

I'll try to have a combination of being a, you know, you have raconteurs and connoisseurs who want to have intellectual conversations and they are also gourmets. And while they're eating these little fondues and caviars and little funny things on toothpicks and then they're having these real deep conversations. And if you've ever been in the cocktail party circuit or you've been an officer and you had to go to the colonel's house or you can even see this in our movies, in our literature.

Read *The Great Gatsby*. You know, where is the substance in that lifestyle where you say, well, I'm going to, you know, find the summit and the pinnacle and the apex of everything it is to be human. I'm going to enjoy fine wine and fine food and fine conversation and bon mots and all this other stuff.

So, you know, you become Dick Cavett. You go around the world, you do all these things. And he says, I'm going to lay hold on folly.

I'm going to put it in its place. I'm going to restrain it and restrict it. You know, it's like when you lay hold on your child.

You're out in the store and they're grabbing stuff off the shelf. You lay hold of them. You control them.

You keep it from running amok. He doesn't say, I'm going to become a fool and see if being a fool works out. Solomon knows better than that.

But he lays hold on it. He says, I want to see what's good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. This is an expanded way of saying under the sun.

I made my works great. I said, I'm going to do something substantial. There's nothing that makes you feel better when you look around and you say, you know, I had a repair to do.

Dan and I both had repairs to do this past week. You look around, something is broken and you fix it. Something needs building, you build it.

Something needs excavating, you excavate it. Needs moving, you move it. You get in there and work on your car.

You work on your plumbing. You work on your fence. You work on your siding, whatever it might be.

I made my works great. I built this. I planted that.

Gardens, orchards, things that are going to reproduce after their kind. Made water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I've innovated.

I've got technology working for me here. I'm improving on the status quo. I acquired servants.

Once I built all this stuff, got to have somebody to run it. I turned it over to them. I've known guys whose specialty was starting a ministry.

That would be first to say. They would come out and say, from the pulpit even, when they were talking, they would say, I really feel like my gift is getting these things underway. Then I turn it over to someone and then I go find another one and start that up.

A really good friend of mine is exceedingly good at that. This is what Solomon says. I've built all these things, then I get the servants to go run them.

It's hands off. I delegate. I let them run the thing.

It's all growing and being maintained. Servants born in the house. Greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

Then I also invested, made investments. Invested in silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and the provinces. Got the system of tribute and taxation going so that all of this can be sustained.

Got to pay the servants. Got to do maintenance costs on all of these buildings and things. So what has he done? This is civilization in a nutshell, isn't it? This is all of human attainment from the fall till now summed up in the life of one man.

He's basically taken the raw, unimproved planet and gone out and filled the earth and subdued it, hasn't he? You think, well, isn't that what God told man to do back in Genesis? Go out and be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it. You've got stewardship over the thing. I've put you over the animals and everything, so conservation and preservation and so forth.

Solomon says, look, my career is a microcosm of the human calling, the human stewardship that God has given. And I've also got these singers and orchestras and delights and had two or three of these troops of entertainers to get me back up to the intellectual heights. I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

You look around, nobody's done this to the level that I have. My wisdom remained with me. I didn't get into sin, didn't go into idolatry, hadn't yet fallen off the wagon in terms of relationship with God, haven't transgressed and become like some of the subsequent kings in Israel who are decried in the Scriptures.

Go read 2 Kings about all of the Asherah poles and the Baalim and the terrible wickedness that

they fostered and encouraged in Israel. Solomon says, my wisdom stayed with me, my chakma. I was prudent as I did all of these.

Whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I didn't withhold my heart from any pleasure. My heart rejoiced in my labor, and this was my reward.

I looked at all the works that my hands had done, on the labor which I had toiled, and it was all Havel and chasing the Ruach. There was no Yitron under the sun. There was nothing of lasting, permanent value.

I can remember having a great time when I was a child playing with my brothers. We used to play guns. I don't know why that was so much fun, but I can remember just months and years of chasing my brothers around the house and hiding behind stuff and coming out with cat guns and pot guns.

When Star Trek came out in the late 60s, they started making these ray guns that would shoot sparks. It had a thing like a flint and a wheel and a lighter. It would shoot these sparks.

We wore out several of those each, just blowing the blazes out of each other. Then suddenly you're alive again. Now they have it in video games.

It's called Doom and Half-Life and that kind of thing where you chase each other through virtual corridors. My brothers and I have actually done that. It's just as bad as when we were kids.

It's fun. It's stimulating. You can try to justify it and say, hand-eye coordination, familiarity with computers, because you have to build a pretty muscle machine.

Games will bring any computer to its knees. It might run business software just fine. But at the end of the day, when you look at permanent, lasting value, you can say, exercise.

Shouldn't boys go out and run and discharge energy? Well, sure. But what do I have that I'm going to carry forward now or in the future other than a really good illustration of my point? From that, I don't have anything in my hand that I can say, this is what I got from that that lasts. This is what I'm going to bring before God in the throne room and show Him and say, look, here it is.

It was gratifying to me. It was fun at the time. I enjoyed it.

I think it was healthy. It's a lot better than, you know, some of the bad things that little boys do, throwing cats against the wall and blowing up little small animals with firecrackers and destructive things, which, you know, is a part of a lot of youth among young men especially. But it was a good, nothing in the world wrong with it, but what's the point? Havel and grasping the wind means where is the substance that goes forward? Where is the value that lasts? Nothing intrinsically wrong, but nothing permanent either.

That's the point. It is not vanity. It is not futility.

It just doesn't get beyond the moment. It doesn't get beyond this life. It doesn't carry forward.

And Solomon is pressing his nose against the glass of the limits of human life. And he says, there's got to be something more. I'm not just a piece of grass that grows up and withers and dies to be replaced by some other piece of grass.

So, verse 12, I turn myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly. What can the man do who succeeds the king? There's nobody going to be better at doing this than me. I've got all the resources.

If anybody's going to answer this puzzle, it's the king. And nobody can do any more than what I'm able to do. They can only do what I've already done.

And he draws a conclusion in verse 13, and this is really kind of where we pick up this morning. He says, I saw that wisdom excels folly. It's like light excels darkness.

There is an intrinsic value to wisdom. It is excellent. Just like there's an intrinsic value to light.

Everybody knows that stumbling around in the darkness is bad. You hurt yourself. Darkness is where evil dwells, where evil hides, where evil men dwell and hide.

I heard a report on National Public Radio from Ireland, and they were talking about the school system over there in a working class neighborhood. The lady living up on a hill used to look out her backyard, and it was rolling fields, and there was nothing there 20 years ago. In the last 20 years, there has now been a community of over 100,000 people move into this valley.

It's a blue collar, working class neighborhood. They've got a school, and they were talking about this school. It started out being a Catholic school, and it's converted over, and this lady is working with these working class kids because they trend toward violence.

They tend to have problems entering into productive life, and this lady who grew up in that and started out that way and was told she wouldn't amount to anything has gone back into the school and has got a program to try to direct them in positive ways, try to educate them, try to show them the value of what they're doing and not to miss the opportunity to get an education and pull themselves up by their bootstraps out of this environment. But they were interviewing some of the teenagers, and it's real fascinating to listen to people who have that Irish brogue. But there's a big park in this community, and they were talking about what a scary thing it is to walk through the park, and people have been tackled and accosted and assaulted, and people know not to go anywhere near it.

It's kind of like Central Park in New York. At night, people know not to go near there. They were shown the report of these burn spots on the ground.

They said, what are these burn spots? They said, well, that's where they lit a car on fire. They said, well, what do they do that for? They said, just to do it. It's just a place where violence and evil happens.

Well, it all happens in the dark, and it happens at night. And so light excels darkness. Light is what causes plants to grow.

You turn over something you left in your yard too long, and you see all those white, unhealthy roots and things. Darkness is bad. Light is good.

Well, wisdom is good, and folly is bad. And Solomon doesn't go in for folly, trying to justify it, and say, well, maybe folly really is the way. He says, wisdom excels folly, like light excels darkness.

The wise man's eyes are in his head. He can see where he's going. He can protect himself.

He can preserve his way. He can make his way in a productive fashion. The fool is the one that walks in darkness.

But I perceived that even though wisdom excels folly, and light excels darkness, that having your eyes in your head is a good thing, the same thing ultimately happens to the wise man and the fool. They both don't have the ability to generate something permanent. And sure, it's better to not hurt yourself as you go through life.

It's better to have some joy and pleasure and some accomplishment. But ultimately, you're going to end up in the same place. You may be taking a better path, but you're ending up at the same destination.

This is what he says, and as it happens to the fool, it also happens to me. Why was I then more wise, ultimately? Sure, my journey was more pleasant, but why was I more wise in the ultimate sense? I said in my heart, this also is Havel. It's impermanent, transient, nothing substantial to hang on to.

Well, thank the good Lord. We know that there is permanent fruit that can be born. We are privileged to live in this age, but it is incumbent on us.

We are called, we are commanded. There are so many imperatives in the New Testament to pay attention to our opportunities each and every day, to redeem our time, to make sure that what we do does partake of the eternal. We tend to take for granted the fact that we are able to produce divine fruit, that our thoughts and intents within our hearts can be pleasing in God's sight and can yield the fruit of faith, which is righteousness.

Righteousness that survives this life, that goes into the eternal future. We just sort of take that for granted. But looking back at Solomon, Solomon says, I don't have that.

I haven't got what you've got. And they didn't. And we're going to have to take some time here in our study of Ecclesiastes and explore the differences between the age of Israel and the age of the Church in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in terms of what the nature of faith and obedience was in that age compared to this, because it was different.

And the ability to bear fruit and abide in the vine, you don't find that kind of language in the Old Testament, do you? You don't see God saying, abide in me and you will bear much fruit, because that's unique to this age. Israel is going to catch up in the Millennial Kingdom. They're going to get the chance to be perfected just as we are perfected.

That's what it talks about in Hebrews. They without us should not be made complete. They haven't been made complete.

They haven't had the chance to exercise that. And Solomon, at the pinnacle of Old Testament wisdom, is perceiving that. Just like Job perceived the need for a Redeemer, Solomon perceives the need to produce something in this life that glorifies God and that lasts.

And this is the documentation of his exploration. The book of Job documents his realization that there needs to be a mediator. There needs to be someone to speak for him before God.

Well, Ecclesiastes documents Solomon's coming to recognize the need for this human life to produce something that lasts, that carries over into the eternal. So we're going to take some time to study that, but for now it is sufficient for us to recognize that we do have that opportunity, and that is why we are here. There's nothing more sad than to have people say, well, you're here to evangelize, you're here to replicate, you're here to reproduce, you're here to win the world for Christ, you're evangelical, you should evangelize.

That is a great part of our opportunity to produce good, but to glorify God in our existence, our body, that's the opportunity that we have. And if we get caught up in the moment and in completing tasks, we will miss it. We'll still complete the tasks, and we can even walk in a way of wisdom and have a reasonably happy life, but we'll miss the chance to have that eternal weight of glory generated, the fruit that is born in that field sowed with the seed of the Word.

So it's something to meditate on. What is it that motivates us to do what we do? Because it's the thoughts and intents of the heart that are judged. This is a good place to pause and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to finish Chapter 2 and see some fascinating things in terms of vocabulary as we go back to Proverbs. But let's pause here and take our break.