

01-05-06a Ecclesiastes

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our Bible study this morning to spend time in prayer, to come before God's throne and remind ourselves of the importance of the undertaking we are about to engage in and to give thanks for the circumstances God has given us that lets us do this together. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the privilege we have this morning of gathering in freedom and privacy without fear of persecution, without threat, without pressure, harmony of mind to gather in worship and refresh our souls in the study of your word and in the fellowship of like-minded believers. We thank you for the leadership that you have placed in authority over us and we pray that your hand will be upon them, that our opportunities and our freedom will not be limited by the events of men and the politics and the scheming and maneuvering that goes on in high places.

We thank you for preserving our nation and the large measure of freedom that we have up to this point. We pray that you will be with those who safeguard our freedom, those who are in service, who are in travel or stationed overseas. We pray for those who represent the gospel of Jesus Christ both at home and abroad on this day.

We pray that you will preserve and protect and provide all of the grace necessary to ensure that your word goes forth like bread upon the waters and does not come back void. We ask your blessing on us here as we study together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, help us to see the truth of the passages that we observed this morning.

We pray that we will not only perceive and understand but that we can remember and apply and be transformed by the power of your word and the presence of your spirit so that we reflect the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name, Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the Psalms, specifically the first Psalm in the fourth book of Psalms, Psalm 90.

This is not the first time that we have visited this psalm for our scripture reading, but it's one of my favorites and since I get to pick the psalms, why we're going to look at this one again. It also does have a more than casual relationship to Ecclesiastes chapter 3 where we are discussing or seeing Solomon discuss the times and the seasons, but this is ascribed to Moses. The rule of thumb, you can generally figure the first 50 psalms in the book of Psalms are authored by David.

Many of the ones subsequent to that are either the author is unnamed and we generally assume that it is David or they are ascribed to another author such as Asaph and in this case to Moses. But, this is particularly significant I think because it is one of the oldest songs for which we have a record in the scriptures and even at that early date, Moses looks back to what God has done in history as well as looking forward and of course no one was more qualified than Moses who authored the history of Israel beginning from the beginnings of the human race forward through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and on down to his own day. But this is inscribed as a prayer of Moses

the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn man to destruction and say return, O children of men, for a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night.

You carry them away like a flood, they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up. In the morning it flourishes and grows up, in the evening it is cut down and withers.

For we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. For all our days have passed away in your wrath, we finish our years like a sigh.

The days of our lives are seventy years and if by reason of strength they are eighty years yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger for as the fear of you so is your wrath.

So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Return O Lord, how long? And have compassion on your servants. O satisfy us early with your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil. Let your work appear to your servants and your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. You can see so many themes in this song that resonate with Solomon's investigation into the temporary vapor-like nature of life and that no matter how hard you work and how great your accomplishments things don't seem to survive. And the closing thought in Moses' song is establish the work of our hands.

If God doesn't establish a thing it is not established, it fades away. It's like the house built on the sand. And contemplating as Moses does here the limited span of our life, 70 years perhaps by reason of strength, 80 years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow in verse 10.

The boast apart from God establishing, apart from God blessing, apart from God's power and God's intervention our lives are a brief flash across the landscape and then it's gone and all of its effects are gone. And the conclusion that Moses draws is that we need to learn to redeem the time. In verse 12 when he says, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

This is wisdom that partakes of that which goes beyond this mortal life. That partakes of the divine and the eternal. And even the Old Testament saints were aware that there was a way to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There was going to be a day, as Job says, I know that my Redeemer lives and I will see him from my flesh when I stand on the last day. But to them it was a distant hope, it was a far off. And in the intervening space all they could see was Sheol, the place of no remembrance, the grave.

There was no bright hope of... Did you ever wonder this? You know there's been a lot of teaching done that says that Old Testament saints went to Abraham's bosom and that this was a place of rest and refreshment and comfort and sort of a holding tank until the Lord would come and empty out Abraham's bosom and take everyone to heaven to be with him. If that were so, wouldn't it have been a wonderful thing for God to tell the Old Testament saints in the same way that Paul tells the New Testament church, we grieve not as those who have no hope, I don't want you to be troubled in mind, I don't want you to be concerned about those who have fallen asleep. And then what he does is talk about the resurrection.

He doesn't say they are face to face with the Lord. He doesn't say they've gone to rest in the great heavenly beyond and they're up there in their interim body or this, that and the other. This is what we do when people are grieving.

We go to a funeral service. We think about the death of loved ones, the death of fellow believers. We say, well, their troubles and trials are over and they're face to face with the Lord and they're this, they're that, they're the other.

And that sentiment is true in a sense. But that's not what scripture says. When scripture comforts those who have been bereaved by the loss of a loved one or a fellow member of the body of Christ, scripture says, comfort yourself with the knowledge that they will rise first.

The dead in Christ will rise. They will meet the Lord in the air. We will join them and so shall we all ever be with the Lord.

That's the comfort. It is the future hope of resurrection that is given as comfort, not some interim state. And you can make of that what you will.

People understand that in different ways. You know what my understanding of that interim time is. I've told you before that I think that it is not an interruption in existence.

It's just bypassing a lot of human history that the rest of us have to go through when someone dies. And the example that I read one time, someone else had had this thought, talked about how if you think of the course of time like a piece of rope, in the Navy we would say a piece of line, a continuous string of some sort. Well, you could let a loop of that dangle down.

Let's say you have it, you stretched it out horizontally, but then you pull two parts of it together so that there's a loop that hangs down. Well, someone could travel straight across and not go through the loop. And some of the rest of us are still traveling along this linear time thing in the

loop, but someone who dies just goes straight from the point of their death to the point of the resurrection.

And they don't have the need to go through. You know, God is outside of time. The angels are outside of time.

We in eternity will be outside of time. It's not difficult to imagine that death is the exit from the linear nature of time, and yet it doesn't involve a loss of existence, although it creates kind of a strange question. If we are continuing on down in the loop and we say, well, where are they? Well, location, geography is sort of not a valid question to ask when you're in a different part of time.

You can say, well, they've gone forward, so to speak. The quantum leap guy used to jump around in time back and forth, and you can think of it in those terms. But I was in an office building the other day, and it struck me.

I don't know if you get into some of these buildings that have been partitioned up into offices. You go up to the 23rd floor of some big building in downtown Dallas, and you go up the elevator. You get out of the elevator, and you look around.

You can either go right or go left, and there are signs that say, well, the suites are here and there. And you go down there, and you walk down a long hallway, and turn a corner, and you get to the door. And the door says, here's the law offices of G.H. Henry, or whoever the client is that I'm trying to find.

And so I go in the door, meet the receptionist, go back, and find a computer that I'm supposed to work on, work on them. And sometimes they'll say, oh, well, you know, Mary Jane, she's back here in accounting. And so you weave around through more suites, and you go through partitions.

You finally get back here to this sick machine. Fix the machine, follow your path back. It's like leaving breadcrumbs, going back through these convoluted maze of cubicles and offices, and get back to where you came in, and say adios and leave.

And if you have to spend very much time, or if you go back repeatedly, well, you sort of learn that path. And often, several times, it has happened to me that if I needed to go, I've cut myself on machines and had a bleeding finger I needed to wash and bind up, or I need to go find the men's room for some reason, whatever. Well, I weave my way all the way back through this convoluted maze, go back by the reception desk, go out the door, go down the hallway, hunt around and find the men's room or whatever, clean the blood off my hand, and wrap it up in something, and go back and finish my work.

But oftentimes, once I become familiar, I discover that there's a door right next to Mary Jane's

cubicle. And when you walk out that door, you're right next to the hallway where the drinking fountain and the restrooms are. And you don't have to go back this big, long way.

There is another door that is a shorter route to the same destination. Well, this happened to me not long ago, and I thought, you know, this reminds me of the case where we, as people still alive in time, in order to get to the point of the resurrection, we're walking back through the cubicles and all back this long path to get to a certain point where when someone dies, they may just be opening the door and walking right there. They don't have to go through this long, convoluted path.

And we can understand that sort of a concept, but as soon as we start thinking about death and resurrection and so forth, we, a lot of times, our mind kind of clenches up and we think, no, that's too weird for me. They've got to be somewhere. I want them to be somewhere just like I'm somewhere, and I don't want to think that they can open the door and get to the resurrection a lot quicker than I can.

But anyway, maybe that analogy will help somebody who didn't understand the looping string. I don't know. But this is what Moses and Solomon both are thinking about.

There is a set span of time in which our life takes place, and after that, there is a later occurrence. It goes beyond the setting of the sun. It goes beyond death.

And the sentiment that Moses concludes his song with is in verse 14. He says, he's been talking about the Lord returning. There's discipline involved.

We learn as we go through life, and we make mistakes. We, just like children, we learn through discipline. But we want the Lord to return and have compassion on us.

We want him to satisfy us early with your mercy, Moses says in 14, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. If we learn and if we grow, there is happiness and blessing in this life. He says, make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us.

Turn our cursing to blessing would be another way of saying this. The years in which we have seen evil, and this doesn't, again, this is one of those raw passages where it means calamity, that which is unpleasant, that which is distasteful. It has a wide range of meaning.

It doesn't necessarily mean moral evil. This is the discipline from God. This is the self-induced misery that comes from failing the grace of God.

He says, make us glad according to the days you have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil. And this seeing evil is parallel to God afflicting. And this would be another place where someone would come and say, see, God forms good and creates evil, and it's all from him.

And that's just not right. This is not moral evil. Let your work appear to your servants and your

glory to their children.

Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us. And Moses, this song near the end of his life, is looking forward. And he says, let it be established.

I want to see it in the future. I want to have that eternal blessing as well as blessing in time. Teach us to number our days so that we gain a heart of wisdom in verse 12.

What's the point of having a heart of wisdom if it perishes when you die? That heart of wisdom, that's the one treasure that we take forward with us when we expire and go forward to the resurrection and beyond, is what we have learned in this life goes with us. They say you can't take it with you, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God by which we live, every lesson that we learn, every truth that we make the object of our faith, what Bob Thieme used to call the edification complex of your soul where the Word of God builds you up and matures you and gives you knowledge and wisdom and insight and perception and all of those wonderful things, every bit of that goes forward with us. And that is what is going to qualify us for blessing.

It will give us capacity. We will remember the things that we've learned. I was listening to my brother Matt the other day when I was on a long drive and he had taught a lesson last year about judging and was going through passages dealing with the importance of judging ourselves rather than judging others.

And he was reviewing, you know, you can go and see a lot of different passages in that regard. But I was reminded he made reference to a passage where we look at the angels and the fall of Lucifer and so forth and that when you go back to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, those passages that talk about how thou art fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of darkness and so forth, and it talks about by the traffic of your commerce you fouled up. That's a loose paraphrase.

But as we have noted in the past and he made reference to, there's an entire civilization with the angels. They're not up there suspended like a mobile over somebody's cradle. I remember seeing one of these that had little angel shapes cut out of shiny brass and they had little trumpets and little wings and you've seen those.

Well, sometimes we kind of think, well, the angels, most of them are just kind of suspended like the stars in the sky in sort of suspended animation. There's a few of them down here running around being our guardians and one or two of them being messengers and telling Mary a baby's coming and so forth. But most of them are just sort of frozen like a tableau in heaven.

They are smarter than us. They've got greater mental capacities. They have greater physical abilities.

Everything about them, we have been made lower than the angels. Well, if you had all of this intelligence and all of this ability, would you just strike a pose and stand there for eternity or get

into an endless chant about the glory of God or something? Holy, holy, holy, glory to God in the highest and just think about it. This is a civilization grander and greater than our own.

There is a lot of stuff going on. I would imagine that there are testaments that record angelic history in the same way that we have an old and new testament that records highlights from human history and God's interaction. And this is going to be another place for research and study and learning about the glory of God and the character of God.

And we'll have perhaps a whole shelf of testaments about God's dealing with His creatures to which we currently don't have access. But the point is this, in eternity, we have a hard time conceiving of something outside of time. But in eternity, things happen.

Stuff goes on. There is civilization. There is learning.

There is progress. You have an infinite God to learn about and to serve and to interact with. And this life is preparation for that life.

Taking our heart of wisdom forward is necessary to fulfill our function. The easiest way to picture it is to think about the millennial kingdom. There is still time and we can still think in terms of sequence and progress.

And we are going to, the ones who overcome, are going to sit with Christ on His throne. And this is a picture of ruling authority. We are going to administrate.

We are going to lead. We are going to adjudicate. We are going to have the responsibility for sorting out things and setting policy and implementing policy and accomplishing concrete tasks.

Well, where is the knowledge going to come from to do that? How are you going to know when a court case comes up and you are the third district circuit court judge in some place in the world, appointed there by God, appointed there under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and here something comes up in the millennial kingdom. There is some sort of dispute. Because we know there is sin.

We know there is death. We know there is all kinds of things that crop up in the kingdom. You have got the terrors sown among the wheat.

And the millennial kingdom is not perfection. That is not the streets of gold and no more tears and so forth. That is the kingdom of the Father.

There is going to be a lot going on. And the terrors are going to be growing up. And by the end there is going to be this huge rebellion.

There will be so much hate and discontent. Satan is going to be let loose. And he is going to lead the Gog and Magog rebellion at the end of that thousand years.

Well, this didn't just spring up ex nihilo. It didn't come from nowhere. This has been fomenting and boiling under the surface all along.

Well, we are going to be ruling and reigning with Christ. These issues are going to come up. We are going to have to perceive.

Where do we get that knowledge? Where do we get the insight and the wisdom to serve well? We develop the heart of wisdom now. These little things, so many times we think, well, we will understand it all by and by. We think, well, the things that God puts us through and the challenges and the tests that we face, the lessons that we learn are just for our life.

Well, I don't quite understand why I am going through this now. But I think later on in life I will be able to look back and see why God, well, it may not be in this life. Most of what we learn is preparation for the next life.

And in year 950 of the millennial kingdom, we will be able to look back and say, I am so glad that I had that disaster befall me back when I was a plebe, back when I was in the human part of my life. Because look how well equipped God knew exactly the place that he had assigned me in the structure for the millennial kingdom. And we can't even imagine what comes beyond that.

But you may never know in this life why these things have happened. And we think, well, we are going to have this grand insight when we get to heaven, quote, unquote. We are going to look back and see how it all fit together in this life.

No, it is forward looking. God's plan looks forward. We are being prepared to serve, to reflect God's glory, to rule and reign with Christ, to partake of the hidden manna, to walk with him in white, to have the name.

We are a part of his staff, if you will. We are like his cabinet. You know, the president has got the cabinet, his close advisors, the ones with whom he consults, and the ones that he works out policy with.

And they implement what the final decisions are. And in a very rough way, that is the promise that is made to believers who progress. And even Old Testament believers understood this.

Job, Moses, David, many of the prophets who wrote Old Testament scripture had a glimpse of this. It was a far off and not near. It was long after the conclusion of the age of Israel and the intercalation of the church age and everything else.

But Moses is one of those who saw. He said, Lord, let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us. God is working all things together for good.

God has a purpose and a reason for all of the things that take place under the sun. And that is the thrust of this song that is recorded for us in Psalm 90. And of course, this is part and parcel of

Solomon's investigation in the book of Ecclesiastes.

So let's return now to Ecclesiastes chapter 3. We have already moved through this initial section of eight verses in chapter 3. We actually sort of hopped over it because in the concluding portion of Ecclesiastes chapter 2, we saw the answer that God gives to the sons of men. God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the man who is good in his sight. But to the sinner, he gives the answer of gathering and collecting that he may give to the one who is good before God.

This also is Hebel and a chasing after the wind. Which part of that, that God gives good to the man who is good in his sight? That's not the bad answer. The bad answer, we've got a limit now.

When Solomon says this is a vapor, this is impermanent, this is temporary, this doesn't partake of that eternal, lasting, established work. What is it in this closing section of chapter 2 that fits that description? It's this gathering and collecting only to have it taken away and given to the one with whom is Jesus going to divide the spoils? He is going to divide the spoils with those who are qualified to inherit. We are heirs according to promise.

Old Testament saints are heirs according to promise. The promise that God gave to them is if you are faithful, if you are obedient, you will partake of the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You will benefit from the covenant God made with David and David's descendants.

If you are unfaithful, this goes all the way back to Genesis 17, the sign of circumcision was a sign of obedience, of orientation to the plan and purpose of God. The man who refused to be circumcised or didn't circumcise his offspring and so forth was cut off from the covenant, cut off from the blessings. Everybody says Abrahamic covenant was unconditional.

I completely don't understand that because it is very conditional. Every covenant is conditional. It is the meeting point between the sovereignty of God and the volition of man.

These covenants are a two-party agreement. Party of the first part, God. Party of the second part, man.

If man does not hold up his end of the agreement to be faithful, to be obedient, God is under no obligation to fulfill his part. Now there are going to be those who are faithful, who are obedient, who do claim and exploit the grace of God. And so the fact that God is going to fulfill his portion of all of these covenants, this is why people get confused.

They say, well, of course God is going to give the land back to Israel. God is going to put the Davidic king back on the throne and so forth. So, I mean, it's going to happen no matter what.

And that's why they try to say it's unconditional. But human participation in the blessings of that are conditional. There are going to be people, there has been a remnant in Israel who are going to be heirs of all of the covenant promises to the nation going all the way back to the Abrahamic covenant forward.

The land promises, the ruling promises and everything else. They're going to be resurrected and enjoy those in the Millennial Kingdom. That thousand year period is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel.

And those people are going to be in the land. They will be with the son of David. And there will be many more who are outside in the darkness which is outside.

They're going to be gnashing their teeth because they thought they were so righteous. They thought they had it all figured out and they didn't. So, to have your work established, to be righteous before God has a future component.

That is where the covenant promises are fulfilled. Go to Hebrews chapter 11 where he talks about all these died in faith not having received the promise. Well, is the promise of God for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and these others that are mentioned in Hebrews 11, is it not fulfilled? Of course it's fulfilled.

When? Without us, they are not made complete. When we join the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ returns at the second advent and the Millennial Kingdom is set up. All of these things will be fulfilled.

So, this is what has been missing in perspective in what Solomon has covered in the first two chapters. And he's just now lifting the corner of the veil, pulling the curtain back just a little bit and saying, you know, all of this has been under the sun, has been between the rising and setting of the sun. This fact that nothing you accomplish will last and nothing you do will be remembered.

It all is like a vapor that's here and gone. But he says, the one who is good in God's sight, God is going to give him wisdom and knowledge and joy. It's not going to be this frustrating, hopeless quest that I've been describing.

Because when God enters in, and you notice he didn't say much about God until we get to this point. He says, God has given an unsatisfactory answer to men. God has given us this frustration.

Why? It's supposed to make us look outside this earthly life. It's supposed to make us look beyond the sun, beyond the day, beyond time and start seeking that which is eternal. Well, what is that which is eternal? It's God.

God is the one who can break this cycle, who can crack this glass dome under which mankind lives. And so we went forward in chapter 3 last time and looked at verse 9 and following. What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given answer with which the son of man are to be answered with, or are answered with.

He, God, has made everything beautiful in its time. God puts eternity in the hearts of men. But no

one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

You can't climb up to that with human wisdom. This is what philosophy and Descartes and all of these other guys have been scratching their heads, and Socrates and Plato going back and coming forward. All of your philosophers, you get Kant and Hegel and all these other guys that have been trying to climb up the ladder of human wisdom and get outside the glass.

And it always fails. You know, I think, therefore I am. And if you've ever taken any courses in philosophy and had to study the philosophers, what a total exercise of frustration, at least it was for me, because they're building upon assumption after assumption and building this big ladder.

It reminds me of building the Tower of Babel. You just keep building and building and building. You think, well, if I get high enough, I'm going to get that big truth that I'm looking for.

And it just collapses under its own weight. It just doesn't fly. It's so ultimately unsatisfying.

There are even people in the Christian world who try to take those tools and try to construct a similar building, and it's equally fruitless. God has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. And we'll cruise back through this when we finish verses 1 through 8. But we went on down to verse 12.

I know that there is nothing good in rejoicing and doing good in their lives. For every man to eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor, this is the gift of God. I know whatever God does, it shall be forever.

This is where you've shattered that dome. There is a thing that lasts and is forever. It's what God does.

It's the work of God. The very same thing that Moses says, Lord, establish the work of our hands for us. God does it that men should fear before Him.

That's the reason He gives them the unsatisfactory answer. That's the reason He plants the knowledge that there's something more, that there's something eternal. He puts eternity in their hearts.

He has the ability to make things beautiful in time. When we get to verse 15 and find that God is going to require an account, this is the fresh perspective that we didn't have in the first couple of chapters. But this idea of the nature of time and the nature of the answer that God gives to men brings up the question of the role that God plays.

Up to this point, it has all been the confines of time and what man can do by man's efforts. Solomon says, I've tried to look at just my accomplishments, just my wealth, just my investigations into pleasure and trying to control men by figuring out folly and trying to get a grip on it and so forth. Whether you have achievements in social engineering, let's say, or in

mechanical engineering, or in construction, gardens, entertainment, all of these different things, you don't find that ultimately eternal value.

It just perishes. You pass it on to someone who's going to fritter it away. He didn't work for it and so forth.

But having come to the conclusion that God can give wisdom and knowledge and joy, where do we go from that? This was the new idea. This is the little fold of the curtain pulled back. Well, right here is where we have this most familiar passage of all of Ecclesiastes, which is the, you remember the song with the little 12-string guitar in the background, and to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck what is planted.

And you're familiar with these. We've read through this a time or two. You will notice that each line seems to present a contrast, opposites, two ends of the spectrum.

And the very first thing we need to do is correct our translation in the New King James in verse 2. I think the New American Standard has it right. But this is not a time to be born. This is a time to give birth.

A time to bear is literally the, and this is the idea of bearing children. But it seems to be more symmetrical in English, and they just switch the active to the passive here in the English to say, well, it's sort of symmetrical that it's your time to be born, it's your time to die. But I want to talk a little bit about this structure when we come back from the break, but we'll get down into the details of this and sort of look at the bark on the trees.

But if you step back and look at the flow of what we've been studying in the book, what is the purpose of this poem? This may have actually existed separately before Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, or it may have been something that he composed to include in this book, but it definitely is a self-contained poem. It's something you could pull out and make into a psalm or a song because of its very tight and interwoven structure. It is introduced with this statement, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

And then you have these 28 separate observations that are made. Well, if you just said, I'm going to list 28 things, this sometimes happens, it's one of the reasons I don't often give you point by point on a passage, because point four, point five, point six. Well, Solomon could have given all of these different observations about different things that happen in the course of life and in the course of time, and you would just bog down with, well, there's a time to buy, there's a time to sell, there's a time to grow, there's a time to reap, there's a time to this, there's a time to break, a time to mend.

Well, it would get pretty tedious. So, there's a lot more going on here than just a list of things that happen in time. And it's a lot more than just a beginning and an ending, a breaking and a

mending.

There's, within the structure, and our old friend the chiasm is present here in spades, there are little chiasms, big chiasms, and those tell us something. They set things against one another, they weave things together and show us what's important, they show us why these particular items out of the thousands in life that could have been chosen have been chosen, why they've been set here. And in the same way that this poem has, you can breeze through it on the surface and maybe not quite see what it's getting at.

We've read this, we've heard it countless times, and yet we haven't really plumbed the depths, we haven't dug out what is here. That's what happens often in life. And this poem all by itself is sort of an ironic comment on what we do in our life, because we go through our life.

We bind and loose, we grow and reap, we do this, that, and the other, and don't really see the structure and the purpose behind it, unless we stop and let God give us the wisdom and knowledge with joy, to make sense out of what otherwise, it's like so many things are ascribed to Yogi Berra, but he is supposed to have said, well, history, that's just one darn thing after another. You know, history is just one darn thing after another. Well, we can look at our life and say, well, it's just one thing after another.

And where is the rhyme and the reason? Is there a purpose? Is there a pattern? Is there some uniting principle that gives it meaning and purpose and definition? Well, there is, but it's not lying right on the surface, just like in this collection in verses one through eight. It's not lying on the surface, but we're going to look at that and see it. But the point here, as we conclude our first lesson is, there is a God in heaven.

He is able to give us wisdom and knowledge with joy. It is literally possible to give thanks in everything. We often think, well, you know, I'm just going to sort of give thanks.

I don't really feel thankful, but I know I'm supposed to be thankful for all things. So, oh, Lord, thank you for this broken leg. Thank you for this painful experience.

Thank you for the loss of this or the inability to do that. Thank you for this thing that's putting pressure on me, making me miserable. It's not a heartfelt thanks.

We do it because we know we're supposed to. But we don't genuinely say, Lord, I appreciate the value of this experience in my life. How can we do that? Well, if we can get hold of what Solomon is communicating to us in these next eight verses, this is the key to seeing the good.

It's an exercise in faith. It's an exercise in confidence that God knows what he's doing. And when the Word of God and what God tells us here is real to us, we can literally take things that others might look at as disasters and be thankful and be appreciative and have joy with our knowledge and with our wisdom.

It is a loving God that brings each and every one of these into our life. And that confidence with knowledge gives us the faith that produces righteousness and that prepares us not only for this life, but the life to come. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, I'm going to go through with you the structure inherent here. And from that structure, we're going to see some very wonderful things.