

01-05-13a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to the book of Psalms. I was torn, there are actually three Psalms that bear on what we're talking about, but Psalm 94 is subtitled in the New King James, God, the refuge of the righteous. The psalmist calling for justice complains of the tyranny and impiety of the wicked.

Psalm 94, O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs, O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth. Rise up, O judge of the earth, render punishment to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? They utter speech and speak insolent things.

All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless.

Yet they say, the Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand. You understand, you senseless among the people, and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see? He who instructs the nations, shall he not correct? He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of a man, that they are futile. Blessed is the man whom you instruct, O Lord, and teach out of your law, that you may give him rest from the days of adversity until the pit is dug for the wicked.

For the Lord will not cast off his people, nor will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence.

If I say, my foot slips, your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul. Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with you? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood.

But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness. The Lord our God shall cut them off." This is a great reminder of the fact that Old Testament saints in general, and David in particular, understood that there is a coming judgment, and that there is an afterlife.

And even though it does not appear that justice is done, or that wrongs are rectified in this life, there is a confidence expressed over and over again by Old Testament inspired authors that God will not leave the wicked unpunished. He will not leave the righteous afflicted without justice, without vindication. And this is particularly important as it illuminates our study in Ecclesiastes, because David here is talking about things that take place in Israel.

Many of the Psalms were written during his days as a fugitive in the cave of Adullam, pursued by

King Saul, an unjust persecution. He was cut off. You can go back and look at the people of Keilah and other towns where David would provide protection for them, and then they would turn around and fail to look out for him.

They would betray him to his enemies. Nabal, the fool, Abigail's husband. You remember the situation with him, where David's men had provided protection and security for him, and when he needed provisions, Nabal wouldn't give him anything.

And so David saddled up and was ready to go in there and wreak havoc, and Abigail went out and appealed, stopped him in the road, and got him to calm down enough to listen to the better side of his nature and to what he knew of the plan of God. Of course, he was so impressed with Abigail, he wound up marrying her after Nabal sort of turned to stone and died. But there is knowledge of the fact that there is a judgment coming for both the righteous and the wicked, and this is specifically in the realm of believers.

There are wicked believers who are going to be cut off because they are unfaithful, they are self-seeking, they are disobedient, arrogant. He talks about the proud who boast in themselves and afflict others, who slay the widow and stranger and murder the fatherless. And this doesn't have to be literal murder.

The New Testament describes for us verbal murder, the hatred and the vindictiveness that is the equivalent of murder in God's eyes, just as covetousness is the equivalent of idolatry. And those who disregard God's observation of these things in verse 7. And you'll remember that verse 14 is quoted in the New Testament, Paul in Romans when he's talking about the fact that God has not cast off His people, even though they are under discipline, even though generation after generation has suffered for their disobedience and their faithlessness, God has not cast off His people and has not forsaken His inheritance. And there is a limit to what divine discipline will do.

It does not remove our salvation, it doesn't take away our eternal life, but we can lose a lot. We can lose blessing, we can lose provision, we can suffer the sin unto death, we can lose the opportunity and the privilege of being in the close proximity of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Millennial Kingdom, of walking with Him, of sitting with Him, ruling with Him, having access even in the Kingdom of the Father to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. It depends on lifestyle choices, depends on priorities that we set in this life.

The dogs and the murderers and the idolaters and those who love and practice a lie are not authorized to enter these special places. There is going to be separation. We know that there is a hierarchy among the angelic creation.

We don't know what it was based on, we don't know a lot about angelic history, but we know that there are classes of angels who have degrees of power, degrees of access to God and to the throne room of God. And in the same way, in the eternal future, do not fall for the modern socially conditioned theology that says it's all going to be one big happy family where everyone is equal

and we will all understand and we'll all know everything and we'll all have equal. The Bible never teaches that.

There is not a place in the Bible that talks about anybody being equal in the eternal future. It is going to depend a lot on what we do here. And we think, well, I'm just carrying out my tasks, I'm living my life, I'm making my decisions, I'm doing my job, I'm getting my responsibilities fulfilled from day to day.

But the thoughts and intents of our heart as we carry out these functions are like, this will probably make sense to nobody but me, but transistors were a wonderful invention. It used to be we had tubes, the old jukebox back here has got a tube type amplifier, but even the tubes, the whole idea of amplification is that you take a tiny little signal such as that generated by the cartridge in a tone arm, the old ceramic cartridges would produce maybe a tenth of a volt because you have a little crystal in there and when it is stressed by the movement of the needle, these little piezoelectric crystals generate a voltage when they're stressed. When vibrations go through them, they generate a little tiny current.

Well, then you've got wires running back from that. Of course, the moving magnet cartridge moves, the needle moves a piece of metal within a magnetic field and that generates a current. It's only about a tenth as strong as what's in a ceramic cartridge, but either way you have this tiny little infinitesimal voltage that travels back along those wires to the amplifier.

And the amplifier, in the old days it was tubes and now it's transistors. Transistors, you can think of it as a box with one wire loop in one side and another wire looping through the other side. And on the first side you have this tiny little current going through.

Well, the little box, which is either the tube or the transistor, senses that little current and on the other side where the big fat wire is, whenever there's a little wiggle in the current on the input side, there's a great big wiggle in a big current on the outside. And so basically you start out with a little tiny impulse on one side and you end up with something that's strong enough to drive speaker cones and make music or voice or whatever on the other side. Well, the voltage on the input side is fairly insignificant and it reminds me of this life.

We think that our decisions and our actions are fairly insignificant in this life. It all gets lost. We can't even remember what we did two weeks ago.

Sometimes when I'm trying to fill out my tracking software for what I do at work and I think, well, I'll do that tomorrow, I'll do that the next day, and then a couple of days later I try to think back, now what did I do on Monday? Who did I call? What computers did I fix? I can't even remember because it just gets lost in the flow of time. But the judgment is the amplifier and the little wiggles in our life, the daily decisions, the thought life, the love, joy, peace and patience, the fruit of the spirit, it may seem small and insignificant in this life, but God is going to amplify that. And to the

extent that we reflect God's glory in small ways by being faithful, by being patient, by stamping out anger when it starts to flare up, by uprooting and getting rid of bitterness when it starts to take root in our souls, those small, seemingly insignificant thoughts and intents of the heart have a huge effect on what happens in the future, and particularly the patterns that we establish, because little actions become patterns.

Habits form. And David was aware of this, and that's part of what he's talking about in Psalm 94. People that have made a pattern out of mistreating others and disregarding others and thinking that God doesn't know and that God doesn't care.

When he says, The Lord God does not see in verse 7, the God of Jacob doesn't understand, it's insignificant. It's not going to matter. God's only interested in the big things.

God is intensely interested in the small things. What could be smaller than the thoughts and intents of one individual human heart? You get up in an airplane and look down at the metroplex, look down at the billions of people on planet Earth, and you think, one person, does God really care? One believer, more or less. One test, more or less, in my life, does He really care? Yes, He really does.

Every word, every thought is accountable. And we have the opportunity to take those thoughts and those words and have them amplified into reflected glory of God in the eternal future. But we have to wake up and smell the coffee.

We have to realize that it really does matter how we think and why we do what we do. And that idea is what is in view in our study in Ecclesiastes, particularly here as we come to this very well-known section of chapter 3. Everything Has Its Time is the subtitle in the New King James. And the little blurb below that, I don't find all that helpful.

By the necessary change of times, vanity is added to human travail. I don't even know what that means, but whatever it is, that's not what the passage is talking about. 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, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to gain and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to sew, a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time of war and a time of peace.

We saw that this very tightly woven and well-structured piece of poetry is inserted in a thread of thought. And we went ahead and followed that thread and sort of completed it in our last few weeks of study that began back in chapter 2. We can pick up the thread in verse 24. There is nothing good in a man eating and drinking in that his soul enjoys good in his labor.

This also I saw was from the hand of God. There's nothing good ultimately. There's nothing that lasts.

We think that, well, that makes a happy life. If you can have what you need, you can eat and drink and enjoy your labor, you've got kind of a pleasant life going there. You see people interviewed on TV all the time.

You hear people talking in casual conversation all the time about how they, in a secular context, how they enjoy their work or they enjoy their musicianship or they enjoy whatever their area of endeavor is. You've got Mr. Tito there who took part of his wealth and bought himself a week-long vacation up in space. And he's been just happier than a clam to have that ambition fulfilled.

It's the highlight of his life to have spent a week locked up in the little tin can with a window up there in orbit. Well, great, that a man should have what he needs and be able to do what he wants and enjoy it. We think, well, what more can you ask for? Let's eat, drink and be merry.

But Solomon says in verse 24, there's nothing good. That's not really good, but it's from the hand of God. And he says, I know what I'm talking about.

Nobody's done these things more than I. Here's what counts, verse 26. God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight. This is the real good, is when you're good in God's sight.

Not that you decide your life is good. There's all kinds of homosexuals and rock stars and other kinds of weird, out-on-the-edge people who think their life is great. They wouldn't change a thing.

Do you really think Madonna, the material girl, would exchange places with anybody? She thinks she's got the world by the tail. But God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight. But to the sinner, and here's where we have this differentiating.

All up to this point, everybody's been in the same boat. It doesn't matter how talented, how rich, how powerful you are. Whatever you do, it's all temporary.

It vanishes when you try to grab a hold of it. It's like a vapor. It's like chasing the wind.

But now, this is a new thing. It's the first time we've seen the eternal enter into this. God has given man this unsatisfactory answer that there's nothing permanent, nothing to hold on to, nothing that really counts and lasts.

But God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to someone who is good in His sight. This starts to get us outside the clear plastic bubble here. The sinner, he gives the answer, I'm just gathering and collecting and giving it away to somebody who is good in God's sight.

And that ought to be frustrating. That ought to make people lift their eyes from the mundane and

the earthly and the material and start thinking beyond the rising and setting of the sun, to think about God. And this is the issue.

And strangely enough, it's the issue for believers. We think, oh yes, those unbelievers, they need to come to God consciousness. They need to be positive at the point of God consciousness and respond to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit when He convicts them of sin, righteousness and judgment.

But more than that, believers need to maintain the consciousness of what is outside the box. This is probably, somebody might find it an offensive or an unsatisfactory comparison, but I often think in terms of scientists, I've got the little white mice in the maze. And I've seen this at first hand and I've also seen film and things of it where they're trying to, I remember specifically where they were doing a study on how far laboratory rats would go to get cocaine.

And they would put them in a little maze and they would run hither and yon and then they would have little decision points, little buttons where you can push the green button or the red button or the button on the left and the button on the right. If you push the button on the right, you get food and water. If you put the button on the left, you get cocaine.

But they had this box and it was constructed out of pine or something and it had these pads and these buttons and things all wired into it and it had a clear plexiglass top. So the rats, all they see are the tunnels in the maze and they're trapped in this environment that's been created for them by the scientists. They're completely unaware of the scientists or the room that the scientists are in or all of the measuring equipment, the wires and the supply tanks that have all of the things.

All they know is this little world in which they have been encased. Well, they get hooked on cocaine or something and they just keep pushing the cocaine button until they die. They starve to death.

They die of thirst and die of hunger because they just get hooked on the feeling. Mac Davis, did he have that? No, it was the other guy. B.J. Thomas said, I'm hooked on a feeling.

That's a bad thing. You don't want to be hooked on a feeling. Anybody that's hooked on a feeling has got a problem.

The Bible doesn't teach being hooked on a feeling but the rats get hooked on a feeling and they kill themselves. Well, in a very crude analogy, we in this earthly life, we get up in the morning, we face our day, we have our circumstances and this is what is in the maze. We come to our decision points and we make decisions.

Well, God wants us to become aware of the world outside the maze to realize that there is more going on than what we see. There is something beyond the rising and setting of the sun, between the turning of the wind and the cycles of life. We are not laboratory rats.

God has put the knowledge of the eternal in us. When we skipped over this poem and got to verse 9, where is the yitron? Where is the lasting value, that which is left over when everything else is added and subtracted from that in which a man labors? I have seen the God-given answer with which the sons of men are to be answered. He has made everything beautiful in its time and He has put eternity in their hearts that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

We are not going to have the full picture but God has put eternity in our hearts. We know that He is there and that He is up to something. Well, if we know He is there and we know He has a plan but we haven't got it all figured out, what does that produce? It produces the necessity for faith.

You can go over to Hebrews chapter 5. Turn with me quickly over to Hebrews chapter 5. This is the New Testament equivalent of what we are talking about. I'm sorry, Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11.

I'm thinking of 11, 5. Hebrews chapter 11. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. We know that God is there.

He has put eternity in our hearts but we don't see the whole picture. God doesn't just... Have you ever looked up into a clear blue sky and thought, I mean I have, thought how great it would be if God would just open a big giant heavenly shutter and we could just see right into heaven. See the angels, see the throne of God.

That would take away all of the questions, all of the doubters, all of the naysayers, all of the questions that crop up in anybody's mind. You just look up and there is God sitting there on His throne surrounded by the cherubim and the seraphim. And now let's just make our choice.

Are we for Him or against Him? Are we going to live for Him or are we going to ignore Him? You just look up in the sky and there He is. Well, essentially God has done that. He has put the knowledge of Himself in the heart of every man.

You go to Romans chapter 1. So that they are without excuse. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence of what we don't see.

That's faith. That there is a reason why God doesn't just open that big heavenly window. Because we are... This is what Jesus told Thomas.

You believe because you've seen the scars and you've put your finger into My side. Blessed are those who not having seen, believe. That's where the blessing is.

That's where the challenge is. Anybody can look at something that's seen and make a decision about it. By faith the men of old obtained a good testimony.

The elders. By faith we understand that the worlds or the ages were framed by the Word of God

so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. There is a... The world and the substance of our life is created out of things that you can't see.

There is something beyond. He goes through and talks about Abel and Enoch. And then he says in verse 6, Without faith it is impossible to please God.

He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God is not there to be seen in the sky. We have to seek.

We have to decide to respond to the knowledge of the Eternal that God has placed in our hearts. The knowledge of Himself that He has put in our heart. We are obligated.

We are required to respond. This is what Solomon is talking about. That knowledge should produce a questioning and a seeking.

We should be dissatisfied with just what we see. And that's why even people who don't believe in God generally adopt some sort of cult or religion or mystical spiritual life. People are not generally thought to be very smart if they don't have some sort of spirituality, people call it today.

We know what genuine spirituality is, but whatever they get into in terms of... Everybody that's got any sense has some concept of things beyond the material and beyond the temporal. Well, rightfully so. But God has put the knowledge of Himself and if we turn to something besides Him, we are faithless and we're going to suffer a penalty.

Well, this is true for believers just as it is for unbelievers. And so we've covered that concept. And back to verse 12 in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, having talked about the fact that God has put this knowledge, He's put eternity in there, but we can't find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

We don't have the whole picture, but we know enough to exercise faith. And that's what we're supposed to do. Then He says in verse 12, I know that there is nothing good for them to just rejoice and to do good in their lives, but that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor.

This is the gift of God. So, the good that is beautiful. Remember that? The good that is beautiful.

That's what we're looking for. The good that God measures. That's what we're after.

Well, we've got that thought in mind and now we come back to this poem. Why in the midst of this thought, you could just cut and paste, you know, get on your word processor and mark 3-1 through 8 and hit your delete key and this would all flow very well. So, why is this here? Well, a time for this and a time for that, a time for this and a time for that.

About 28 different things get mentioned here. What has that got to do with the argument? It

doesn't, on the surface, to me at least, it doesn't really seem to fit. You've got the yin and you've got the yang, you've got the black and you've got the white, you've got the good and you've got the bad.

Well, how does that fit? Well, let's take a look and see how it fits. First of all, we have an introduction. The introduction is verse 1 of chapter 3. To everything there is a season, there is a time for every purpose under heaven.

And we saw that there are two different words in use here, the word for season and the word for time. And this word for time is keppets, C-H-E-P-E-T-S. Now, keppets has the idea of time in the same way that the English word does.

We can use time in a general sense, we can say what time is it, we're talking about a very specific time, or we can say, well, in the time of Christ, and we're talking about a whole generation. So that word has flexibility. And keppets in Hebrew has that same sort of flexibility.

But the first word that was used here, to everything there is a season, that was zaman, which is Z-M-A-N. And zaman implies that there is an appointment. Someone has determined this time.

So the first statement says, there is an appointed time for everything. And the Hebrew word order here is important. Literally it says, to everything there is a zaman, there is an appointed time.

And this suggests to us the fact that God is the appointer. God determines how human history unfolds, both on the macro scale and in our individual life. When we encounter things, it's not a surprise, it's not random, it isn't kismet, it isn't fate, it's not karma.

God appoints the events of history on the large and the small scale. Then the second line says, and there is an et for every purpose. I think I said kepets earlier.

Kepets is purpose or goal. That was the word that we looked at last time. That's not time, et is the word for time, E-T.

Kepets, C-H-E-P-E-T-S, is the word for goal or purpose. And you remember last time, we went and looked at the last words of David over in 2 Samuel to get a feel for what this word means. And I didn't quite get to finish that 2 Samuel passage last time.

And I'd like to give you the last few words of that, or last few verses, which includes the words, in 2 Samuel 23. 2 Samuel 23, 1-7, gives the last words of David. And we had to re-translate this for ourselves because the English translation, I think, badly misses the point.

2 Samuel 23, now these are the words of David, the last, or the last ones. David the son of Jesse declares, and the mighty man who was raised up declares, the Mashiah, the anointed one of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel. This is David's epitaph, so to speak.

This is what he says, the Spirit of the Lord spoke in me, and His words are upon my tongue. Verse 3, the God of Israel spoke to me, the rock of Israel said. And then you have a second set of quotes.

We had a first set of quotes beginning in verse 2, which quotes the words of David. Now in verse 3b, we have an interior quote, a single quote. This is what God said.

The one ruling among men righteously is the one ruling in the fear of God. If you're going to do it right, you've got to do it in the fear of God. And like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, from brightness, from rain, fresh grass from the earth.

Then in verse 5, and you can close the little interior quote there, because now David is quoting indirectly. Remember your English back from school. He said, quote, I am going to the store, close quote.

That's a direct quote. Or we can say, he said that he was going to the store. Well, if we use the word that, then we don't have a quote, and this is sort of a general, we're not giving a word for word quote.

We might be summarizing. We might be loosely giving the idea. Well, that's what David begins doing in verse 5. And so in verse 5, he said that not so is my house before God.

Well, what is David's house? Those are David's sons, David's offspring. What's going to happen in the ruling house of Israel, the sons of David, they're not going to be the righteous who rule among men in the fear of God, and who are going to be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, that the morning without clouds, the brightness and the rain, fresh grass from the earth, all of the production of the field that ought to be taking place in that environment. Not so is my house before God.

This is what God told David. But that he has set an everlasting covenant for me. The fact that my house is not perfect, that my house is not going to do that, doesn't change the everlasting covenant.

He has set an everlasting covenant for me, ordered in all and secure. That is for all my deliverance and every desirable goal that was not caused to sprout. Now this verse 5 is very important because David, this is the last thing he's talking about.

He's at the end of his life. He's reviewing his life and looking forward to the judgment. He says, God spoke to me.

He said the measure, what was David's calling in life? It was to rule. David was anointed to be king over Israel. So what's going to be the measure of his life? Did you rule in the fear of God? Were you like the sun on a cloudless morning after a rain where the grass can spring up and

grow? Is that what you... Well David was, but his house is not going to be that way before God.

It's not going to be until David's greater son comes that the fulfillment of that calling for the house of David really blossoms and flourishes. He said, not so is my house before God, but he has set an everlasting covenant for me, ordered in all and secure for all my deliverance and every desirable goal that was not caused to sprout. David had a lot of goals that didn't come to fruition.

He wanted the temple to be built. He wanted that rule of righteousness and the fear of God and for Israel to prosper and grow and to fulfill all of the covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But David didn't live to see those accomplished in his lifetime.

The complete prosperity that should follow the military victories that he accomplished, David didn't live to see that, both nationally in his calling with Israel and personally. David didn't see the vindication and the full growth into righteousness that could have been his. He made a lot of mistakes.

He had a lot of failures. But he had many desirable goals that didn't sprout in his lifetime. So he says in verse 5 that this everlasting covenant that's ordered in all and secure is for my deliverance, all my deliverance, and every desirable goal that was not caused to sprout.

A lot of unfinished business in David's life, in other words. This everlasting covenant that is ordered in everything and secure is going to be the fulfillment of these unsprouted desirable goals. Now in verse 6, this is where we left off and we didn't get to do verse 6 and 7, but it's equally important.

Verse 6, "...but the worthless ones..." Now if you look at this in the New King James or the New American Standard, it sounds like worthless people. He says this just gets all messed up. "...truly is not my house so with God, yet my house is like sunshine after rain.

My sons and all of my dynasty is all going to be this way. He's made an everlasting covenant with me. Will he not indeed make it grow?" It's not what David is talking about.

He says there are many unfulfilled things. Even though my life has failures, even though my sons have failures, there is an everlasting covenant that is ordered and secured and my desirable goals that were not yet fulfilled are going to sprout. The covenant guarantees it.

And what is the ultimate sprout? The root shoot from the stump of Jesse is the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what the fulfillment of these are going to be. This is a prophecy.

This is a foreshadowing of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, David's greater son. David's house and David's lifetime is not all of these things, but the Lord Jesus Christ is going to fulfill that covenant. All of these unfulfilled desires that have not yet sprouted are going to sprout.

That's Netzer, Jesus, the Nazarene. Netzer, it's a play on words. Netzer means the root, the root

shoot, that springs up from the root.

Remember, there's a prophecy in the New Testament. This was to fulfill... They said, well, he wasn't born down in Judea. He's from Nazareth.

He's a Nazarene. This was spoken to fulfill. He shall be called a Nazarene.

There's no Old Testament passage that says the Messiah is going to be called a Nazarene. It says he's the Netzer. He's the root shoot from the stump of Jesse.

And the word there for the root shoot is Netzer. And Nazarene is a play on Netzer. Well, David is talking about this here when he says that my deliverance and my desirable goals that didn't sprout, didn't spring up like that fresh grass on a cloudless morning are going to come into being because of the everlasting covenant that's ordered and secure.

But the worthless ones, in verse 6, the worthless what? Worthless people? We haven't been talking about a contrast between the good and the wicked or anything. Why would worthless people suddenly come into view here? It's the worthless goals. It's the waste of time.

In our New Testament vocabulary for the worthless here, this, by the way, is Belial. Worthless people are sons of Belial, sons of worthlessness. When you want to talk about worthless people, they're sons of Belial, Bene Belial.

You can drive up and down sometimes and you'll see a synagogue-looking thing and it'll say B'nai Berith. It looks like B'nai Berith when you look at it. Well, Berith is covenant in Hebrew.

B'nai is sons of. Sons of the covenant. B'nai Berith.

Sons of the covenant. Well, B'nai means sons of. Well, B'nai Belial is sons of worthlessness.

Worthless ones. Here, it's not B'nai Belial. It's just Belial by itself.

Worthlessness. The worthless ones, like thorns. Well, worthless what? Worthless goals.

Worthless desires. Wood, hay, and stubble is the New Testament vocabulary for this. The desirable goals are going to sprout because of the everlasting covenant.

But the worthless ones, the Belial, every one of them, it says, will be thrust away like thorns. The word order, literally in Hebrew, this says, but the worthless ones, like thorns, cleared away. All of them.

That's how it reads in Hebrew. Well, when you say the worthless ones, what's your last solid noun in context? Desirable goal. Goals.

You had desirable goals that didn't sprout, but you have worthless ones. Worthless goals, they're

like thorns. Wood, hay, and stubble.

Remember Hebrews chapter 6, the ground with the rain coming many times upon it, if it only produces thorns and briars, it is fit for burning. It's near a curse. Well, David says, I've had thorns.

I've pursued wrong things. I've done wrong things. I've wasted time.

And all of those goals and things, like thorns, are going to be cleared away. All of them. Why? Because they cannot be taken in the hand.

What happens when you try to take a thorn bush in your hand? You get stuck. It harms you. It's worthless.

It doesn't have value. You can't take it in the hand. You can't take it with you, in other words.

These are all the goals that you can't take with you. If you try to take a hold of them, they wound you. They're thorns and briars.

Thorns and briars. The worthless ones, like thorns, cleared away all of them because they are not taken in the hand. It doesn't say they cannot be.

It says they are not taken in the hand. Then verse 7, Now the man who... And the verb here can either mean to touch or to strike. The man who strikes them... And I choose the translation strike because of what follows.

Now the man who strikes them... Strikes what? These thorns. How do you clear thorns out of a field in Old Testament days? Well, you don't go in there and rip them out with your hands. What do you do? The man who strikes them will be full of iron and the wooden shaft of a spear.

That's what it literally says. The man who strikes them... And what is them? Go to your immediate context. It's the thorns.

What are the thorns? Go to your immediate context. Worthless. All of the worthless produce of your life.

The man... And who is the man who's going to strike them that's going to be full of iron and this wooden shaft of a spear? And of course, this wooden spear shaft... I mean, it makes me think they will turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Well, what do you do with a pruning hook and with iron? You take a spear shaft, you put iron on the end of it and you strike away all of these thorns. What do you do with them once you've stricken them violently out of the soil? Then you gather them.

And literally this says, and with fire burning they will be burned where they sit. They don't go forward into the eternal future. Where do they sit? They sit in time.

They sit under the sun. They're a part of this temporary life. They don't partake of the eternal.

They don't partake of the divine. And so, the Lord Jesus Christ at the judgment, and this is specifically here, the judgment for Old Testament saints. You don't have that many passages on the judgment of Old Testament saints, but this is one of them.

What's David thinking about on his deathbed? The last words that he speaks. The judgment is coming up. I've had good goals that haven't yet sprouted, but the eternal covenant is going to take care of those.

And all of my worthless goals, like thorns, every one of them is going to be struck out, gathered up, and burned. It's the equivalent of the wood, hay, and stubble fire at the judgment seat of Christ. But this is the judgment seat for Old Testament saints.

David says, look, this stuff isn't eternal. You can't take it in your hand. It's in the same way you can't take a vapor in your hand.

You can't chase the wind and grasp it. Well, all of this stuff that you did produce, the thorns and brambles, you can't take that in a hand either. To the extent you take that into your hand, you wound yourself.

David says, the man who's going to strike those, he's going to do it with iron and with the shaft of a spear. These are symbolic of judgment. This stuff is going to be struck out of the ground violently, gathered together, and burning, it will be burned.

Remember, dying thou shalt die. This is an intensive in Hebrew. When you take the infinitive and double it with the verb in the imperfect like this, God said, in the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die.

It's the infinitive plus the imperfect, the future. Well, here you have the very same thing. Burning, they will be burned.

And it's intensive. These thorns, this is going to make a big, roaring, crackling fire at the judgment for Old Testament saints. These worthless goals, this waste of time stuff that can't be taken in the hand.

And there is an Esh, there is a man, and this is the God man, this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is going to preside at the judgment of Old Testament saints just as He presides at the judgment seat of Christ. He is going to rule them with a rod of iron, remember? So, with the Lord Jesus Christ presiding at that judgment of Old Testament saints, what distinguishes these two types of goals? What makes something thorns that can't be taken in the hand, that you have to get a spear shaft and put iron on the end of it and uproot violently and shove this stuff into a pile and light it on fire and burn it? What distinguishes those sorts of goals from the desirable goals that

are guaranteed by the covenant? Well, that tells you right there, the covenant is the Word of God.

The things that are a part of the purpose and plan of God, the things that God covenants with man to produce, those are the goals that sprout like the new grass after a rain on the cloudless morning. I love that hymn, The Unclouded Day. They tell me of an unclouded day.

They tell me of an unclouded sky. This is the dawn of righteousness. This is where all of the thorns have been cleared away and that which has been planted in the soil that's useful, the fresh green grass is going to spring up.

All of the desirable goals are going to have their fulfillment. And we exercise faith in this life, don't we? We trust God. And many times it doesn't seem to have any visible result.

You can be patient and nobody notices. You can forgive a great insult and the person that insulted you isn't even aware that they insulted you. You can be deeply slighted and deeply hurt and you exercise the power that God puts in your soul.

You keep your patience. You keep your forbearance. You forgive.

You return good for evil. And you think, you know, I don't think this is working right. That person doesn't even know.

I think I ought to let them know first how deeply hurt I am and then I'll forgive them. Then they'll be impressed and this will be a useful thing. But to just quietly forgive and go along as though nothing has happened, well, I don't see any fruit from that.

I don't see any vindication. Well, in this life there's probably not going to be vindication for a lot of these things. It's something that's been planted but it hasn't sprouted.

The goal is righteousness but we don't see the shoot and the branches and the fruit of righteousness from these exercises in patience, exercises in endurance, exercises in forgiveness, exercises in endurance, putting up, bearing up with day after day and week after week and we just have this urge to let somebody know. We want to let someone know that all was not well and sort of let them be impressed with how great we are that we've produced this fruit. What both Ecclesiastes and what David is talking about with his final breath is these are sprouts for that cloudless morning.

These are sprouts for after the thorns have been cleared away by the man with the spear handle, with the iron who can deal with those thorns, who will burn them, vanish them away so that that green grass can sprout. This is faith that God sees. Remember Psalm 94? God sees and God knows all of these things and that's what counts.

That's what partakes of the divine. That's what partakes of the eternal. Now this is the substance.

This is the grit. This is where the tires hit the pavement of our daily life. Why should you do what you do with a hearty, positive attitude when it's unappreciated, when it is misconstrued, when it is criticized? Why should you be patient and forgiving and not angry and not bitter when it doesn't seem to produce any visible result? Think like David.

I have a lot of sprouts that I haven't seen in this life, but there's an everlasting covenant that guarantees that they're going to sprout. They're going to be visible. They are going to be manifest.

That reflected glory of God is going to show in the future. That's faith. Faith says, I do what I do because I am confident that great Him, I know not when the Lord may come at night or noonday fare.

I know not whether I'll trod the veil with Him, the valley of the shadow of death, or meet Him in the air, but I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day. We commit these things to the Lord. We commit our patience and our peace and our forgiveness and our quenching of the flame of anger and the root of bitterness.

We commit that to God. We let Him vindicate and display and reflect His glory off of these things. And it's not going to happen in this life.

Most of it's going to be in the next. That's faith. Do you really believe there's a resurrection? Do you really believe there's a judgment? Do you really believe that there's a hereafter where this will be vindicated, where it will be justified, it will be manifest? If we believe that, that is the strength.

That is where the righteousness comes from. Righteousness by faith. That's where God the Holy Spirit makes the Word of God alive and powerful in our soul.

That is the fuel that gives us the ability to forgive, to be patient, to be forbearing, to be long-suffering, to absorb wrongs, to keep on enduring, to keep on persevering, and doing the right thing even when conventional wisdom says it isn't right. Or when even our own instincts or our own memory of the past or something crops up and tries to tell us, well, what the Word of God says can't be quite right. Knowing this truth and seizing and laying hold of it and applying it on a minute-by-minute, day-by-day basis in the mundane, seemingly insignificant, little ripples of life, the amplifier is there.

These little decisions, little victories in attitude will be magnified. Paul tells us we have no idea that this momentary light affliction is going to produce such a weight of glory in the future. That is our calling.

That is our task. And it was the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New. And that's what Solomon is getting at here.

And we're going to pause now and take our break, but when we come back, we're going to see that this poem, this tightly woven, structured section here in verses 1 through 8 of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 directly illustrates and is the pinnacle of this whole thought process that we've documented in the section that preceded and the section that followed. And it is just as true for us today as it was in the Old Testament days in which Solomon wrote. But this is a good place for us to pause and take our break.