

01-05-20b Ecclesiastes

We're ready now to resume our study, and we sort of already have as we've been talking through the break and reviewing the passage in 2 Kings 3, where every time Dan plays that, we are God's people, I feel like I'm going to stand up and preach instead of teach. It's a very inspiring arrangement of that great song, and we also sang it this morning as a hymn, so we got a double blessing there. But there have been people who talk about Elisha, and talk about the prophets, that this was not exactly charismatic, but that there was mysticism, and that there were things associated with other religions, what we would call pagan religions, where people needed an inducement.

You know, the whirling dervishes would whirl around until they get dizzy and see visions, or people that use chemicals, or people that chant, and they use different things to try to send themselves into a state where they feel like they're partaking of some other realm. And some people have come to this passage with Elisha where he says, you know, bring me the musician so I can get into a state where I can deliver a prophecy. But that's a pretty human viewpoint solution, and I think there is a valid point that you can make, and you can make it many places in Scripture, that music is a part of worship and fellowship with God.

There is singing, the Psalms, where we just have the lyrics, we don't have the sheet music, but the Psalms of David, the first 50, and several others that are ascribed to him in the Psalter, were all set to music. And David was a musician, and one of the most prolific writers of inspired Scripture, and this was a part of his musicianship, was putting the words that came into his heart through the ministry of God's Spirit in a tune. Long ago there was a newspaper article that made all of us laugh, it was back when I was in seminary up in Tulsa, and some guy had concluded that the Hebrew vowel points actually contained the tunes, that you could recover David's tunes by going back and reading the vowel points in a certain way, but anybody that knows anything about Hebrew, there were no such things as vowel points in David's day.

They were added much later by the Masoretic scribes because the Hebrew spoken language was dying out, and to be able to ensure that the text was vocalized properly, these were like marginal notes added to the consonantal text, so there was no possible way to construe those as tunes. And I heard somebody play a couple of tunes that they based on these vowel points, and it sounded like a train wreck to me, but he thought he was really on to something there. But there is a valid relationship with music.

Sing unto the Lord, how many times do you see that? Sing unto the Lord a new song. The saints up in glory are going to sing a song. The angels around the throne sing.

There's a useful way to look at this and not decide that Elisha was trying to work himself into a state. But it did happen in verse 15 of 2 Kings 3 that when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him, and he said, make this valley full of ditches. He told him to basically destroy

the whole Moabite area, cut down the trees, stop up the springs, attack every fortified city, every choice city, cut down every good tree, ruin every good piece of land with stones.

And so if you go on, we didn't do this in the first lesson, but it happened in the morning when the grain offering was offered. Suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water. When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered.

They stood at the border. Then they rose up early in the morning. The sun was shining on the water.

The Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood. And they said, this is blood. The kings have surely struck swords and have killed one another.

Now, therefore, Moab to the spoil. So when they came to the camp of Israel, Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites so that they fled before them. They entered their land, killing the Moabites.

Then they destroyed the cities. Each man threw a stone on every good piece of land and filled it. They stopped up all the springs of water and cut down all the good trees.

But they left the stones of Kir Haraseth intact. However, the slingers surrounded and attacked them. This is when the kings saw the battle was too fierce.

It took 700 men to break through to the king of Edom. They couldn't. So he took his eldest son, who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall.

There was great indignation against Israel. And so they departed from him and returned to their own land. Basically, if you translate this properly, they were shocked and horrified at what they saw on the wall.

And they just left. And that's the one city they did not devastate. But this all ties back to the idea of there is a time to gather stones or a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

Casting away stones has the idea of destruction in the same way that tearing down or parats to break through. And we make these kinds of decisions every day in large and small arenas. There is a time in child nurturing.

We run into this at Buckner all the time. There is a time to sit down and counsel and try to reason and point out the positive things. There's other times when penalties need to be inflicted.

And when that doesn't happen, the kids run amok. Janelle and I have both been in situations over there where their hands are tied because of state law, and you just want to get out of there until the situation passes. But people have to make decisions.

We make decisions in each one of these areas, and it gives us the opportunity to reach beyond time and partake of eternity. And this is where the yitron, this is where the prophet is. As you move forward in the poem and get to verse 6, we once again have a situation where there is intensification to seek or gain something in the first line, to lose or give up something in the second.

When you have this idea of giving up or giving up as lost, that verb is the same verb as was used at the beginning of verse 5 when it said to cast away stones. Well, the verb for cast away is the same as to give up or cast away at the end of verse 6. Very same verb, very same infinitive, same form and everything. And it puts us in mind of the parables of Jesus in Luke 15 where he tells the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin and ultimately the lost son, what we call the prodigal son.

And he talks about the woman who has the coins, and this was often a little headdress that was part of their dowry or whatever, and a little coin would come loose. And I'm all the time, the girls have different chain-based jewelry or the chain for Patty's glasses or something, and any time you have a chain, you have those little loops in the end that hook on the fasteners or the ornament, and those loops come apart and something comes off and falls down and gets lost and you've got to find another loop. Even if you find the ornament, you generally don't find the little ring that holds it on.

You have to cannibalize some other item to fix that one. Well, this is what happens to the lady. Those coins were held onto the headband with these little rings and she'd be knocking herself in the head, I could have had a V8 or something, and first thing you know she loses a coin.

And so then she's searching the house trying to find it because the whole headdress is marred and isn't fit to be worn in public with one of the coins missing. It would be like running around with one earring or a pearl missing out of your necklace or something. So she's hunting all over the house trying to find it.

There is a time to seek. Well, if you seek and seek and seek, how long are you going to seek? What if the thing fell off in the marketplace and someone picked it up and carried it off and it's never going to be found? How long do you seek before you finally give up? Well, it's a judgment call. I was working on my watch.

I've had this watch 20 years. I got it in 1981 in Okinawa. It's a Seiko.

It's a digital watch. It's a great watch. It's getting a little beat up, but I love this watch.

It's been with me. I can't tell how many times I've changed out the band. I've changed out the battery.

You take it all apart and when you get the mechanism out, there's a little microscopic spring. It's

like the spring in a ballpoint pen, but it's a microscopic size. It sticks up out of the mechanism and touches the back of the watch.

That's what makes it beep. It's got this little beeping noise it makes. When the alarm goes off, it'll wake me up.

Even though it's a small sound, my ear is tuned to that. I can be dead to the world at 4 in the morning, and when my watch goes off, it wakes me right up. Well, that little spring is what makes that beeping thing work.

I was up at my folks, and I took my watch apart, put in a new battery, put it all back together, and it wouldn't beep. I took it back apart, and I had lost that little bitty spring. Well, I got down on the carpet, and I looked, and I looked, and I looked, and I looked, and the thing is just so small.

I got a magnet and dragged around. I could not find the little spring. Here's this watch.

At that time, I'd had it 15, 16 years. I thought, you know, the whole thing is kaput, and I couldn't find the little spring. Well, ultimately, I fixed it a different way.

But there is a time to give up. I had to give up. I never did find that spring.

If you must know, I took a winding wire out of a motor, that real fine wire, and wrapped it around a pin, and made a little coil and stuck it in there. It works great. But there's a time when you have to give up, looking for something that is lost, and that's a judgment call.

You have to make a decision. You have to balance the factors and say, I've invested this much time. Should I keep looking, or should I give up and take another course? God does this with believers.

Jesus told the parable of the shepherd who goes out to seek and to save that which was lost. Well, he's not going to wander, you know, all the mountains, thunder riven, I go to the desert to find my sheep, you know, the 99 song. Well, Jesus is not still out on the mountainside searching for the lost sheep, is he? Jesus came to his generation.

We've been studying this in Luke. And he came to seek and to save that which was lost. And he spent a window of time challenging his generation with the opportunity with the gospel of the kingdom.

And then he stopped. And he is no longer seeking in that generation. He is no longer seeking the faithful in Israel and challenging them to come.

That time has passed. We have a decision point. We have to evaluate when is it time to move on.

There is a time to seek, and there is a time to throw away. And you basically say, this happened, this pump organ right here in the living room. My dad brought it over in the pickup truck from

Claremore to Tahlequah.

And it was in his pickup, strapped down, everything was fine. But, you know, you get to go 60 miles an hour and the wind ripped the music rack off. And I could not, I got obsessed with that music rack because we drove that a lot.

And when he came over and it wasn't there, I came over just within a few days. And I rode my bicycle from his house all the way down the road to the highway, which is, I don't know, five miles or so. And I rode my bike all the way to Pryor, which is a 20, 25-minute drive from my folks.

I rode my bicycle looking on both sides of the road to see. I knew it had blown off, and it had probably blown off in the early part of the trip. And I was sure it was there.

And ever after, all the rest of the time, and still, I catch myself when I'm driving that road looking to think, it's got to be here somewhere. You know, somebody probably picked it up five minutes after it blew off, and it was never there to be found. But I just obsessed on it and couldn't get past it.

There is a time to realize that something is irretrievably lost, whether it's an opportunity, whether it's a relationship, whether it is a potential for something. And we have to turn loose of it and let it go. And many times it goes against our nature and goes against our grain to do that.

And we have to exercise faith. In fact, if you look at each of these lines, there is an opportunity for faith. There are promises of God.

And I could dwell here for weeks just on this poem, going to the scriptures that talk about giving birth and death, killing and healing, casting away and gathering. I will let you pursue that in your own meditations. And from the storehouse in your own soul, because we do want to finish Ecclesiastes in our lifetime.

But think about this. Weep with those who weep. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

How do you know when to do that? When is someone's sorrow inappropriate? And you shouldn't be weeping with them. You need to be encouraging them to pull out of it. You're bereaved.

I see people on TV sometimes, and they say, oh, you know, I can't get over the death of my daughter, killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, or killed by a drunk driver, this, that, and the other. And people can't get past it. They can't reconstruct their life.

They obsess on it, like I obsessed on that music rack. And what they need to do is do what Dad and I did, which is go get some wood and make a new one. Fortunately, we had two organs, had one with an identical music rack, and were able to, I mean, it's virtually undetectable.

And it was a lot of fun. One of the great days I've had with my dad, we spent a day making this

new music rack. And we didn't really have the tools you're supposed to have for that kind of thing, but we made it work.

And it was one of the days that stands out in my memory. But you have to know, from the Word of God, if you're going to convert these times into something eternal, into something that reflects God's glory, that potential is there. And rather than obsessing on the circumstance, we need to step back and say, where is the opportunity for faith? All of us have circumstances.

All of us have challenges. All of us have relationships. All of us have tasks and responsibilities.

And in every single one of these, it is so sad. It just is heartbreaking to listen to the standard presentation of the Christian life that is given in churches and is being given at this moment all over the place, where it's all about impact. It's all about let's go out to the highways and byways and compel them to come in.

And that is one very small slice of what we do as believers. And we miss the minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day opportunities to convert, to redeem the time, to convert it from that which is under the sun and is going to perish when we perish to that which lasts and is eternal, something you can take with you, something that is a Yitron, it is a prophet. Well, each of these, I could dwell on these.

I've got passages all over the place on these. But I wanted to move on through. Take a look at verse 7, the tearing of clothes and the sewing together.

Tearing apart and sewing together is what is presented in general here. You think of it in terms of mourning. Genesis 37, 29, where you have the idea of ripping the clothes in mourning and being upset.

When Reuben comes back to the pit where they had Joseph and found out that he'd been sold into slavery, he tore his clothes. He said to his brothers, the lad is no more. Where shall I go? And he's all upset.

What am I going to do? I was surety to our father. I'm going to be in big trouble here. I'm the firstborn.

And 2 Samuel 1, 11, where there is in the life of David, you have David taking hold of his clothes and tearing them when he finds out the death of Saul and Jonathan. David took hold of his own clothes and tore them and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel because they had fallen by the sword.

This could have been an opportunity for rejoicing. You think about how Saul hounded David, made him a fugitive and a criminal for years and years and years. David didn't have the opportunity to spend time with his father Jesse and with his brothers and with his family.

He didn't live a normal life in Israel. He was living in a cave and had to hire himself out as a mercenary and feign madness. And he could have blamed all of this on Saul.

But when Saul and Jonathan died, David made a decision. Is this a time to rejoice or is this a time to mourn? Is this a time to gather everything together and go move into the palace and let everybody know that Samuel anointed me to be king? David says this is a time to mourn. This is a time to tear.

This is a time to be sad. And he was. And it was from the heart.

It wasn't a superficial, it wasn't an act. So this tearing often has the idea of the tearing of clothes in mourning. There is a time to be silent and there's a time to speak.

And boy, if this isn't something that comes up every day. How many times have we wished we could reach into the air and pull back the words that we've spoken before they hit the ears of the hearer? How often do we wish that we had stayed quiet and let someone else speak? I've often thought back, I get the opportunity to spend time with someone and I get to rattling on and rambling. You can blame it on your communication gift, but it's basically just bad judgment.

And realizing that here was someone I could have learned from, I could have found out about, I could have heard what was going on. In fact, I do this even with my own daughter. One of my daughters, I have a tendency to always ask her yes and no questions.

When we're on the phone, I say, well, are you having a good time in school today? Yes, Dad. Have you had your lunch yet? No, Dad. And I am practicing the art of asking leading questions that will give her a chance to speak and tell me what she's thinking and what's important to her.

What's important to me is, are you getting your stuff done? Have you eaten? That's what's important to me. And I get yes and no answers. I want to hear what's important to her.

And there's a time to be silent and leave a space for somebody else to speak. And I have to learn, all of us have to learn, how to do that. There's a great quote.

Ben Sirah was one of the writers in the intertestamental period and one of the books that is not in the canon of scripture but is an old book in Israel is his writing. And in 26 of his book, this is his quote. There is one who keeps silent because he has no answer while another keeps silent because he knows when to speak.

So he's basically saying there are two reasons why you can not be talking. There's one who keeps silent because he has no answer. Remember that thing, better to be silent, be thought a fool, than open your mouth and remove all doubt.

And there is one who keeps silent because he has no answer while another keeps silent because

he knows when to speak. And I had some practice in this at seminary. You know, you hear things and you say, that's not what the word of God means or says or that's a theological error there you're putting forward to this class.

But you've got to pick your battles. You can win a battle and lose the war. There are times when we're with family or with other believers and they may get off on a thing where we've been blessed and we know better.

But it's not always the time to confront and to correct and rebuke and instruct one another in righteousness. There is a time to speak the truth in love. But to know that this is a great opportunity for partaking of the eternal, for laying up an eternal weight of glory, for producing the fruit of righteousness.

Because sometimes you have to trust God when you say, I'm just going to remain silent. I'm not going to make an issue out of this. Are we being cowardly when we don't rock the boat? Or are we being wise in picking our battles? We need something beyond our own wisdom for this.

There is a time to speak. There is a time to remain silent. And remember what James says, the man who can bring his tongue, who can bridle his tongue, can bring his whole body into subjection.

It's the hardest thing. And that's one of the reasons this is down toward the end of this poem. Because this gets progressively more sophisticated as you go through.

And you finally end up in verse 8 with there is a time for love, and a time for hate, and a time for war, and a time for peace. And once again when you get to verse 8, we have love and hate which are infinitives, but we have war and peace which are nouns. And the change in construction from the Lamed infinitives that we've had almost all the way through the poem, we had a change halfway through, and we had a change again at the end.

And all of this, I could paint you a beautiful picture of how great this chiasmic structure is and how things correspond. But really what we wanted, we know that it's a chiasm and we know that it has a point. And the point is summed up here as you get to the final lines.

You have love and peace contrasted or crossed in a chiasm with hate and war. Once again there's intensification. Love and hate are more personal expressions of what's going on in your soul in the same way that weeping and laughing are more personal.

Mourning and dancing are more public. Well, war and peace are out there in the public. This is your corporate response.

This is much larger and partakes. There's more people involved than just yourself. You can love and you can hate all by yourself.

But to wage war or to promote peace, this is generally on a national level or a community level. So all of these themes are related. You can go back to the very beginning of the poem, giving birth versus dying.

In a time of peace, that's when you remember the baby boom? That was the peace that followed World War II. There's a great intertwining of this. And the point is, are these different opportunities, these conditions that arise in life, these decision points, are they just going to be happenstances or are we going to convert them to eternal fruit? Solomon has moved us from the physical evaluation of life to a spiritual evaluation, the response of the soul to circumstances.

That is the issue. That is why we are here. It is not the physical measure that counts.

It's what happened in our soul. What was the process? Was there faith involved? Two people can be dancing. The people in Israel danced on two different occasions and were praising the God that brought them out of the land of Israel.

In one case, it was a great praise song. When Miriam and the ladies danced with the timbrels, the horse and rider had been cast into the sea, they were celebrating God. Well, they were also celebrating the same God in front of the golden calf.

But it was a completely different exercise and they were disciplined and judged for that. God threatened to wipe them out because of that particular dance. And yet they were talking about the God that delivered them out of Egypt in both cases.

Something changed in the heart. Something was different in the soul so that one of those was a praise that reflects God's eternal glory and the other was an exercise in bringing divine discipline and judgment down on their heads. And for some of them, it was probably difficult to tell the difference because of their lack of orientation to the plan and purpose of God.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 2. This is like statesman songs. When I'm in it, I think it's my favorite passage in the whole Bible. This is the song of Hannah.

Do you remember the story of Hannah? A man with two wives. The other wife has all the children. Hannah is barren.

She goes down to Shiloh to pray. Eli sees her there and promises her that she's going to have a son and she does and it's Samuel. And so as a result of this, they come down and they dedicate Samuel and offer the sacrifices.

And she says, I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives. He will be lent to the Lord. And they worship the Lord there.

And then Hannah prays. And this is the song of Hannah. She says, My heart rejoices in the Lord.

My horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies because I rejoice in your deliverance. No one is holy like the Lord.

There is none beside you, nor is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly. Let no arrogance come from your mouth for the Lord is the God of knowledge and by him actions are weighed.

And then she goes into a series of contrasts, not unlike what we have in Ecclesiastes. You've got the mighty men with their strength and their bows. She says, The bows of the mighty men are broken.

But those who stumbled are girded with strength. It's a paradox. The strong are made weak.

The weak are made strong. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread. And the hungry have ceased to hunger.

Even the barren has borne seven. Now she hasn't had seven. She's had one.

But in her mind, Samuel is as good as seven. Even the barren has borne seven. And she who has many children has become feeble.

The Lord kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and does what? People say there's no concept of resurrection in the Old Testament. The Lord brings down to the grave and brings up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he has set the world upon them. What are the pillars? This is the foundation. This defines the boundaries.

When you pour a foundation or you lay a foundation, that sets the limits of the house. You don't build a house where you don't have the foundation. When you establish the pillars and you set the foundation, those are the limits.

And she's saying God sets these boundaries, these poles that we've seen in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, the outside edges of things. God established those. The pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he has set the world upon them.

He will guard the feet of his holy ones, his saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces.

From heaven he will thunder against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give

strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

It was known in the Old Testament age, it was known in the Old Testament times that there was more to life than the physical, than the external. But to get there, to realize that God is going to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart was very difficult. This is the classic mistake in Israel, was treating the law as an external system and not realizing that it is what you do with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, that determines whether there is going to be any profit.

When you go forward here in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, after the poem, what does Solomon say? He asks the same question. What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given answer with which the sons of men are to be answered. And initially, it seems futile, it seems frustrating.

You can't take it with you. Even unbelievers have that phrase. God has made everything beautiful in its time.

And the word beautiful there as we have seen is yapheh, y-a-p-h-e-h. God is the one who makes things beautiful in its time. It can be a time of mourning.

It can be a time of tearing down. It can be one of these negative, these undesirables that we have seen. But God can make that a beautiful time.

It doesn't say He's made the desirable things beautiful. He's made everything beautiful in its time. All of these have their time.

And there is beauty, there is that good which is beautiful in each of these. How can you take a time of tearing down or a time of mourning, a time of dying, and convert it into something beautiful and something good? God does that. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. This word, when it says He has put eternity in their hearts, the word translated eternity there is olam. Olam is unto the ages.

Whenever you see the phrase forever, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, the end of Psalm 23, olam. Remember that prefixed olamit is the same one we've had in front of all these infinitives. To or for is what that preposition means.

To the ages. Olam means indefinite time. There is a possibility that there is a play on words here because there is another perfectly good Hebrew word that has the same consonants but has different vowels.

And of course when Solomon wrote this they weren't using vowel points. But there is also the word elam, which is E-L-A-M. It has the aleph and the lamet and the maim there.

And that is the word for ignorance or darkness. And there are some who think that the Masorete's got the pointing wrong here and that what the passage says is that He has put darkness or ignorance in their hearts so that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. This concept and the word elam in fact is found here in Ecclesiastes over in chapter 12, verse 14.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter in 12.13. Of course this is like jumping to the end of the book. Fear God and keep His commandments for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing.

Well the word translated secret there is elam. Every hidden thing, every unknown thing, things we think are unknown are going to be revealed. Paul makes the very same point in the New Testament when he says that the hidden things are going to be revealed and every work is going to be brought into judgment.

But this is the ending. If you want to know where Solomon is going, this is the last page of the book. What does it say? The conclusion of the whole matter.

Fear God and keep His commandments. This is the whole duty of man. This is why we're here.

Why? God will bring every work into judgment. What did we do in these times? Did we get distracted and say, oh, well, my life is down at the building with the steeple and the pews and the education and the parking lot and all of that. My life is down there when we're assembled.

My life is down there when we're ministering. My life is when I write the check or when I give the support or when I pray for someone. So many of us as believers miss this truth.

Solomon is pleading with his generation just as Jesus pleaded with His. The prophets, the apostles, every generation of believers in that dispensation and in this have the opportunity to convert time, which is temporary, into eternity. It's a daily potential.

It's an hourly, minute-by-minute potential. As we sit here, we're going to get up and leave and do other things this afternoon and tomorrow and the next day. There is a time for everything.

As we make those decisions, as we evaluate priorities, as we look at factors and choose what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, if we make those decisions and choose those courses of action based on the Word of God, because we are doing things heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, we're measuring by a divine standard and not a human standard. We are producing divine good. We are the branches producing that eternal fruit.

We are the field. We are the vineyard. All of those biblical pictures.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? God has put the knowledge of Himself within us. And as unbelievers, as reprobate believers, God wants to turn us, to enable us to transcend the

limitations of physical life, of mortality, of sinfulness, of all of the things that encase us in this life under the sun. God is going to bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it's good or whether it's evil.

The thoughts and intents of our heart. We think, well, as I'm sitting here typing on my computer or as I'm sitting here doing dishes or driving down the road, nobody can see my face. Nobody knows my heart.

I can fantasize. I can toy with 16 different kinds of vengeance on this person, but I won't actually act out on any of them. We just missed an opportunity to convert time into eternity because we are tearing down in our mind.

You know what Jesus said about lust and about hate, that if you do it in your heart, it's all the same as if you've committed the act. Why does He say that? The impact isn't the same. The guy didn't actually lose his life.

The woman didn't actually become assaulted. But that space of time where those thoughts were engaged in, that produces sin and evil instead of good and reflection of God's glory. As you go forward in Ecclesiastes 3, and we'll see this in a little bit more detail the next time we are here, but He says, I know that there is nothing good for man to rejoice and do good in their lives and that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor.

Even though this is the gift of God, that by itself is not enough to get a satisfactory outcome in circumstances. We settle for that. We say, well, the circumstances turned out okay.

I had enough money at the end of the month. I had food on my table. I got my tasks accomplished.

I finished what I started. I was vindicated. People appreciated me.

Things went well. And we satisfy ourselves with that. Solomon says, not good.

It's not good enough. And what is our passage on this? Go again to the passage we looked at a week or two ago, Ecclesiastes 5, verse 18. And on this note, we close today.

Solomon says, here is what I have seen. It is good, and in the New King James it says, it is good and fitting for one to eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor which he toils under the sun. It sounds like, well, that sounds like it's contradicting what we just saw in chapter 3. But when you get the translation straightened out here, and literally from the Hebrew, of course in Hebrew this is verse 17, but he says, Hine, behold, Asher Ra'ati, Ra'iti actually, behold that which I have seen, myself, Ani.

He's got the emphatic, I myself have seen this. Tov, which is Yafei, the good which is beautiful. What did we just see in chapter 3? God has made everything beautiful in its time.

God can take these seemingly mundane, unimportant decisions and make them beautiful. Whether you're mourning or laughing, whether you're dancing or mourning, whether you're tearing down or building up, sometimes it seems like, well, it doesn't really make a difference in the sweep of things. God can make that beautiful.

The Tov, the good which is beautiful, Ecclesiastes 5.18 says, is for one to eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all of the days of his life which God gives him, for it is his heritage. For every man to whom God, this is verse 19, every man to whom God has given riches and wealth and given him power to eat of it, to partake of it, to enjoy it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor, this is the gift of God. God has given us the gift of transcending time.

God has given us the gift of redeeming the time, of converting the minutes and hours and days of our lives into something that has an eternal consequence. All you have to do is go to Revelation 20 and following to look at the heritage that Solomon is talking about here. Is your portion going to be the smoke that ascends from the lake of fire? Or is your portion going to be of the trees that grow by the river that flows from under the throne of God in the New Jerusalem? Are you going to have the right, the privilege of reaching up and picking fruit from the tree of life or not? What is it that gives us that ability? What is it that lays up treasure in heaven? What is it that gives us title to all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places? It is righteousness by faith.

It is not the outcome in circumstances. You may be faithful. You may learn and grow and prosper in your fellowship with the Lord God.

The Son and the Father and the Spirit may all be dwelling in your soul. And you may never lead anyone to Christ. You may never share the Gospel.

You may never see a visible impact. That doesn't mean it isn't there, but you may never see it in this life. You may be like David.

There are many desirable goals that didn't seem to come to fruition. But God knows, God sees, and to have the faith and the confidence that there is a city whose founder and builder is God. Abraham never saw that city.

Read Hebrews 11. He dwelt in tents waiting for that city. That's righteousness by faith.

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. That's why he's in the roster of the faithful. That's why Abraham is mentioned three dozen times in the New Testament.

I was sort of struck by that. I was looking for the children that are raised up to Abraham. I couldn't remember the passage, and I put it in the concordance.

I said, find Abraham in the New Testament. He's in there like three dozen times. Why? Abraham

believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.

He believed in four small things. Everybody has marriages. Everybody has children here and there.

But Abraham believed God for his son when it looked like it couldn't happen. And that has raised him up to be the patriarch of the nation of Israel. We have a similar opportunity, and that's really what Solomon is driving at here.

As you look at the normal ebb and flow of the affairs of life, look at it as a potential to find the good that is beautiful. The answer that God gives the sons of men is it's all futile unless it partakes of the divine, unless it transcends life under the sun. That's our opportunity today and every day that we have remaining to us in this life.

Well, let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you that you have given us the opportunity, even as we are mortal and living in a physical universe and a fallen world with a sinful nature, yet through your grace, through the power of your word and your spirit and what Christ did for us on the cross, we have the opportunity to even now begin to partake of eternal things. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will keep our minds alive to that possibility that we will see that our decisions and the pattern of our thoughts, all of those things are important, whether they are seen or unseen, whether they are manifest or whether they are hidden, whether they are private or whether they are public.

It isn't a matter of modeling, it isn't a matter of witness, it's a matter of whether or not we are bearing the fruit of righteousness that lasts through all eternity. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.