

01-06-10a Ecclesiastes

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our worship to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit as we look at the truth of His Word together. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for the privilege that we enjoy of being able to gather and study Your Word together. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the work that He accomplished on our behalf to deliver us from an impossible situation, our guilt, our hopeless, helpless, and useless condition.

Because of His perfect life, because of His atoning death on the cross, we have been delivered and have been entered into relationship with You. Not only have we been rescued from eternal damnation, but we have also been given the opportunity to reflect Your glory and to accomplish Your purpose. And we pray that as we worship together, as we enjoy fellowship and the benefits and blessings that come from the ministry of each spiritual gift, we pray that our time spent will be productive, that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds in such a way that as we set our priorities and make our decisions and accomplish our responsibilities in the days ahead, each issue that comes to our minds, each doing in which we are engaged, it will be an opportunity to fulfill our calling.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen. I think particularly about the great status that we enjoy in Christ, having been visited by the Jehovah's Witnesses yesterday. I think sometimes there is a temptation that slips up on us when we know somebody comes and they are in error.

It is as though they are a legitimate target and that we can, you know, I've heard people in the past talk about, oh boy, the Jehovah's Witnesses came and we really ripped them up one side and down the other. People will get very ugly with someone like the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses if they come in contact with them. I think it is important to remember that just because someone is wrong, it doesn't suspend the rules by which we live.

There are people who take this to an extreme and try to shoot abortion doctors or hurl insults and abuse and get very ugly toward people that they perceive are in the wrong. And it's obvious sometimes that someone is in error, sometimes grievous error, but it doesn't excuse us from the responsibility to be lights shining in the world. And even when Jesus rebuked people who were clearly in error, we've been seeing this in our Luke study, He didn't get ugly.

He didn't sink to their level. He didn't commit sins of the tongue or mental attitude sins and didn't sort of show off in front of others in the course of ridiculing or belittling or haranguing someone who didn't understand the truth. But it was a reminder.

I don't often spend time thinking about the cults and the perversions of biblical truth, but when somebody comes to your door and they have a Bible tucked under their arm and they have a lady and a child with them and they're very friendly in their approach, they've gotten much more subtle

now. They don't come right up and say, Hi there, I'm a Jehovah's Witness, would you like a copy of the Watchtower? They begin with questions that are designed to draw you into making positive affirmations and saying yes. And this is a well-known sales technique, whether you're a car salesman or an Amway distributor or whatever, you want to get your potential customer or your potential victim, you want them to start saying yes.

And so the questions that you ask, it's psychological. You want people to be answering yes. And so this guy came to the door and after Elizabeth called me up there, he said, well, we're going around and we're concerned about the bad state of our society today.

It seems like there's a lot of problems in the world. Wouldn't you agree? Well, who's going to say, no, I don't really think there are many problems in the world? Of course, you say, well, sure, we've got lots of problems in society. And he said, well, wouldn't it be great if everyone in the world would be a better person and do better things and follow biblical teachings? And of course, you're supposed to say yes to that.

And I said, well, let me sort of cut to the chase here and tell you that I'm a pastor and I'm very familiar with what the Word of God says, to let him know that he didn't need to kind of start from scratch and evangelize me or something to his religion. And he said, well, that's great, but let me, I still want you to answer my question. Wouldn't it be great if everyone would follow biblical teachings? Wouldn't the world be a better place? And of course, you're supposed to say yes to this, and it's another in your long strings of yeses.

And I said, well, you would normally answer yes to that, but there is a caveat. You have to base that on something. It isn't just people doing good things or doing what the Bible says.

There is a foundation that has to be laid first in Christ. And without that foundation, people doing what the Bible says isn't the answer to problems. Because he said, well, what do you think the biggest problem in the world is? And I said, the biggest problem in the world is sin.

And their idea is, well, you overcome sin with good, with doing good and obedience and works and so forth. And I said, the sin problem is only solved in one way, and that's by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is an area where, if you're familiar with the JW's at all, you know that they don't consider Jesus Christ to be equal to God.

He is a son, not the son of God. And it is not his atoning work on the cross that accomplishes salvation. It's a lot of other things.

So I knew this was going to be sort of a point of contention. And, of course, he didn't want to contend. He wants to stay on the yes, yes, yes mode.

So he says, well, if sin is the problem, then wouldn't it be great if everyone did what the Bible said and they weren't sinning? And I said, well, again, you're getting the cart in the road and you've got

no horse attached. It isn't the doing of good that makes the world a better place. It is salvation.

It is deliverance from sin through the work of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation. Then, with that in place, having the word of God and keeping it is a wonderful thing.

But you can't just say if everybody kept the word of God. And he kept saying, well, but let's grant that they are saved. And then shouldn't they be doing what the Bible says? I said, well, the second issue that I take with what you're saying is who is interpreting what the Bible says? Because the Pharisees, of course, we're right in the middle of this in Luke chapter 11 where Jesus is giving the woes to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were the Bible experts. You remember Namakos, the man who speaks up when Jesus is saying, woe to you Pharisees. You're washing the outside of the dish and the inside is full of rapacity.

Rapacity and corruption. And if you could just get the world to do what the Bible says, you're washing the outside of the dish. What is going on on the inside? That has to take place.

And, of course, most of these cults and even a lot of Christian denominations and religions concentrate on what do you look like as you go through your day? What are you doing? How do you appear? Do you have a good witness? Do you have a good testimony? And we often bypass, as Jesus told the Pharisees, he says you're bypassing your responsibility for evaluating yourself. You're bypassing the responsibility for the love of God. You do what you do because you love God, not because you want to appear good or you want to work off guilt or you want to balance the bad things that you've done or any other things.

So, anyway, to make a long story short, the guy decided that it was fruitless to continue his interview and said, well, I handed him back their little magazine. But they no longer come out with the unique tenets of their cult or their religion, if you want to call it that. He said, well, in talking about this issue of everybody doing what the Bible says, I said, I have studied the Word of God for a long time.

I've been trained in Greek and in Hebrew because he asked me what denomination I was from. I said, we're a Bible church. We just look straight at the Scriptures and we're not going to go by some second-hand formulation of what the Bible says.

We don't go by creeds. We don't go by denominational statements of faith. We go to the Word of God and see what God said.

I figure if he put it there for us to read, then why take second-hand or third-hand or fourth-hand interpretation of it? I said, after studying the Word of God and knowing what your group believes, I am convinced that the Word of God does not teach what you believe. You're going around saying, well, if everybody did what we think the Bible says, wouldn't the world be a better place?

It's wrong on so many accounts. The point is not to make the world a better place.

The world has fallen and it's going to be fallen until the Lord Jesus Christ comes and establishes his kingdom. There's poverty in the world. People want to go solve poverty to make the world a better place.

Jesus said, look, the poor you're always going to have with you. It's not going to get any better. People say war and all of these political maneuverings and coup d'etats and people oppressing other people and taking charge of the government and so forth.

If we could just fix that, the world would be a better place. Well, Jesus said, there will be wars and rumors of wars until I come. It is pointless to sit around and try to solve the world's ills and make the world a better place.

And if your reason for doing good is, I'm going to go forth and do good because I want to help make the world a better place, that's what Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees. You do what you do because you love God, not because you want to make the world a better place. And if you just kind of bypass the love of God as your primary motivation, then you can kind of pat yourself on the back and say, well, I'm not a part of the problem.

I'm a part of the solution. I'm making the world a better place. God says, you're wasting your time.

It is only that which is motivated. It's the thoughts and intents of our hearts. If you look at Hebrews 4.12, the word of God is living and active.

It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces as far as the division of the soul and the spirit and of the joints and the marrow. And it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

That's what God is interested in, the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is not what we do. It is why we do it.

That's why you can't live in legalism. You can't make rules and say, well, if I always follow this rule, if I never consort with someone outside my marriage, then I will be righteous. Jesus told his generation, look, if you look at a woman and lust after her in your heart, you've committed the same level of sin as if you had committed the physical act.

Remember, Jimmy Carter got in trouble in his interview. Somebody was saying, well, have you ever lusted after someone in your heart, and so forth. But the point is, there are times when it is appropriate to kill another human being.

It's going to happen tomorrow, Lord willing. And the yo-yo that blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City is going to finally, after what's it been, six years, our justice is not swift and it's not sure, but it does eventually lumber around occasionally and do the right thing. But that individual is going to have his life ended, and there's lots of people that are all upset about taking a human

life and so forth.

There is a time to take a human life. Warfare, capital punishment, self-defense. There is a time to take a human life.

But what determines whether when you take that life, you're right or you're wrong? Let's say you dress somebody up in a Marine Corps uniform, give them a M16 rifle and send them out into the jungle of Vietnam and say, fire away. Anything that moves on the other side of the rice paddy there, kill it. That doesn't make every killing right.

And we've had situations where, well, what about this village full of women and children that was wiped out by this Army Ranger recon team? You know, we had a senator here not long ago that something he was involved in in Vietnam got dredged back up to the front. Well, was it right or was it wrong to kill these people? And people start saying, well, why did you do that? And he's saying, well, we mistook them for Viet Cong guerrillas. We didn't realize until after we'd shot them that it was just old men and women and children.

But everybody understands that it's why they did what they did that matters. If they just were frustrated because they couldn't find any Viet Cong and they said, well, we'll make them pay, we'll kill their families, and they lined them up against the wall and executed them, most people, even in the secular world, would consider that to be wrong. On the other hand, if it was foggy, if they were shooting at moving targets and they blazed away and killed a bunch of people and got up there and found out that they were unarmed civilians, well, it's different.

The action was the same, but the level of guilt or innocence attached to it is different because of what they were thinking when they did it. And this is what God looks at. It is the thoughts and intents of the heart that establish righteousness or establish sin.

Now, there are actions. You can't say, well, but I went out and committed adultery because I was deeply in love, and that makes my adultery right. We can't rationalize sin and make it good by saying, well, my intentions were good.

But God's judgment is based on what we think. It is why we do what we do. What was our goal? What were we pursuing? There is never a time when you can commit adultery and have it be right.

I heard a pastor one time who was counseling a woman, and this woman had had a history of abuse. I think she'd been married once or twice, and both of her husbands had physically abused her and slapped her around, and she had all kinds of issues with trust and with self-confidence and with insecurity and so forth. And he was counseling her, and he made several mistakes that led up to this because he counseled her one-on-one.

He counseled her at his house and at her house, and he felt the need to try to nurture this woman

and try to restore her self-esteem and try to let her know that she was valuable and she was attractive and she was worthwhile. And he wound up having a romance with her, and he himself was married. But his intention, at least initially, he wasn't just trying to take advantage of her.

This wasn't a pattern for him. But a combination of factors in his mind and in his heart, he really wanted to be a positive influence on this woman. And he got into this romance thinking, I need to give this woman a positive experience.

Obviously, there were some other things wrapped into it. He must have found her attractive. But people can have good intentions.

There are certain things that are always wrong no matter what. You cannot break your covenant promises to your spouse ever and have it be right. It is pornography.

That is what Jesus talked about in the New Testament when he said that divorce, except in the case of pornography, is impermissible. And pornography is the breaking of the covenant promise. And if someone fractures that promise, violates it, then things are different.

But that is always wrong. But God, man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart.

And this is something that all of the works-based religions, even lordship salvation, which has sprung up right at the very heart and center of Christianity, is wrong because it says your salvation depends not only upon trusting Christ for your salvation but acknowledging him as Lord and producing the fruit of obedience in connection with your faith. And if your faith doesn't produce works, it's not saving faith. It's head faith and not heart faith.

Bob Wilkin had a really good article in the most recent copy of Graze to You, which is a publication of the Evangelical Theological Society. Actually, it's not ETS. It's the Graze Evangelical Society, G-E-S.

And they exist to promote and communicate salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, and to try to identify and educate people about all of the perversions of that truth. And there was a book that came out a few years ago written by John MacArthur, and he is one of the major proponents within the conservative evangelical world of lordship salvation. John MacArthur is a wonderful student of the Word of God.

He's done a lot of great teaching. He's got a radio show. If you hear it and listen to him teach, most of what he teaches out of the Word of God is great.

But he has gotten messed up on salvation, and that leaks over into a lot of his teaching. But he has the idea, which is an outgrowth of Calvinism, that if you are truly saved, you will produce good works. And good works and acknowledging Christ as Lord is essential to salvation.

You can't just trust Him and claim His work on the cross on your behalf. You have to also make Him the Lord of your life. And if you trust Him and go to God and say, I claim the work of Christ on my behalf, I know that I'm hopeless, helpless, and useless.

I am guilty of sin, and I'm hellbound. I need the righteousness of Christ to establish a relationship with you. You go to God and claim Christ as your Lord, acknowledge Him as the solution for your separation from God as a result of sin and condemnation, you are saved.

And whether you go any further and acknowledge God and say, well, I really need to learn the Bible and become obedient. Christ needs it. You can go on and be the biggest reprobate that ever lived.

And you will be a cloud without rain. You will be a field that produces thorns and thistles and is fit for burning and near to a curse. You are still saved, but you are saved yet so as by fire.

You are saved by the skin of your teeth in the sense that your salvation, the reason God saved you, isn't really accomplished. God doesn't just save us so that we don't go to the lake of fire or so that we're not eternally separated from Him. He saves us to enter us into a productive life and to make us useful in His service, to reflect His glory.

And we don't reflect His glory if all we do is grab the ticket out of the lake of fire and then quit. But that doesn't change the fact that if all we do is grab the ticket out of the lake of fire and quit, we are still saved. But people who don't understand that, then every time they find a disciplined passage in the Scripture that says these people are going to be snapped out of the trunk of the tree and gathered in bundles and burned in the sense of the produce of their life, people say, well, that has to be unbelievers.

That could never happen to someone who is saved. Yes, it can. Paul in Romans, when he was talking in 9, 10, 11 there about the Israelites having been broken off out of the plan of God and the Gentiles being grafted in, he said, you stay in the tree by faith.

And if you become faithless like Israel did, God snapped them out of the tree and gathered them up and burned them. This is not loss of salvation. This is loss of function and fruit producing in God's plan.

If you've got an unfruitful branch on a shrub or a tree, especially if you have a fruit tree, an apple tree or a pear tree or something, you want it to produce fruit. Well, if you've got a twisty branch there that doesn't produce any blossoms and doesn't produce any fruit, you trim that off so that the rest of the tree that is healthy and fruit bearing will get the resources that were going to that and it makes the tree more productive. I saw the ladies out here in the yard this weekend trimming and pruning and trying to make the trees as productive as they can be.

And things that are not useful and not doing what you want to, you snip them out of there. Well,

the same is true for believers. And we are judged, we are evaluated based on why we do what we do.

Ten different people in the church can drop money in the offering plate. And when God looks at the heart, maybe only three of them are credited with righteousness. The other seven, one of them put it in because the guy sitting next to him was looking and he didn't want to be embarrassed.

Another one put it in because he figured, well, you know, God's watching and if I put this ten bucks in then maybe he'll bless this real estate deal I've got going this coming week or he'll help me find the car I'm shopping for or something. You know, it's kind of like a payoff. They would never call it bribing God, but they figure, well, you know, God has to kind of pay attention to me and give me some blessing because look at all this money I'm putting in the plate.

And the third person might be putting it in because they, you know, took the pew Bible five years before and they're feeling guilty. And they think, well, I'll put this ten bucks in the plate and I'll kind of pay for that pew Bible I ripped off. Or whatever it may be.

You know, people just have all kinds of motivations. Well, if that's what God is looking at, God doesn't just say, well, credit ten dollars worth of righteousness to everybody that dropped the bill in the plate. In the same way that he doesn't credit people just for attendance or doesn't credit them just for standing up and singing the hymns or doesn't credit them for sharing the gospel.

There are people who go out and share the gospel with other people because they're working off guilt. They know that they've had an area of failure in their life. And they think, well, you know, I'm in the red, if you will, spiritually because of this area of sin or this failure.

So, I'll go do some positive things and kind of balance the scale. God will say, well, here's the deficit and here's the positive and it will all kind of even out and I'll be okay. That is not a valid motivation and God will not credit righteousness to the person who events.

And somebody may even get saved. You know, the word of God carries its own power. You can write it on the bathroom wall and it can evangelize someone.

It doesn't mean the bathroom wall gets credit for someone being saved. And the person who evangelizes may get no righteousness credited to their account. Because they were doing it for the wrong reasons.

But if they speak the word of God, the word of God cannot be diminished. Its power cannot be subtracted from it. And you can find the word of God in the mouth of a... There's people who have been evangelized by unbelievers who didn't even know what they were talking about.

But they spoke the word of God. They referred people to the scriptures. And God's word and God's power cannot be diminished, can't be broken.

And the power that's in God's word is what accomplishes salvation. It's not the effectiveness of the evangelistic presentation and so on. Or the sincerity of the person who's doing it.

Or even the salvation status of the person doing it. So this is the point. Hebrews 4.12 The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

Why is the word of God sharp? Why isn't the word of God a balm? Like the balm in Gilead that heals the sin sick soul. The word of God doesn't describe itself as being a medicine. It doesn't describe itself as being a bandage.

Or a pill that will cure headaches. We think, oh, you know, it's the comfort and encouragement from the word of God. Well, the author of Hebrews says, look, the word of God is a sword.

And it chops you open. It splits you apart right down to the bone. And then splits your bones apart.

That's what this verse says. It is living. It is active.

It's like the whorling sword that was in the hand of the angel that guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden. It moves under its own power. It's living.

It is active. It's busy. It's out there doing things.

And however sharp a sword you want to think about. Think about a razor blade. Think about a surgeon's scalpel.

Think about a laser scalpel. Whatever you want to think of that's sharp and that can divide flesh. Well, the word of God is sharper than that.

It cuts through the flesh and gets at that which is at the center. It pierces as far as dividing even the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow. And there's a very graphic image here.

If you think about the machaira, the sharp sword that the Greeks and Romans used. The short sword, I should say, was used in the Greek-speaking world. The machaira was sort of a Roman invention.

Always before that, they had the big, long, broad sword that was sharpened on one edge. And you would get it. It was a two-handed sword.

And it was big and heavy. And you would lift it up and you'd give one big chop and try to rift asunder whatever was in front of you. Well, once you made your chop, then you're vulnerable because you've got to pull that thing back up and get ready for another big swing.

Well, the beauty of the Roman machaira, the short, two-edged sword, was that it wasn't so heavy.

And instead of raising it up over your head and coming down with one big chop like an executioner, you could cut in both directions. You could put your, kind of like a fencer, put your left hand behind your back there, and you can swing to the left, swing to the right, swing to the left, swing to the right.

And you don't even have to turn the sword. It's sharp on both sides. You can parry and thrust, and you had a lot more ability to do damage and defend yourself with that short sword.

It was much more effective. And it quickly, that's one of the reasons the Romans conquered the world. Their weaponry was so much better than the barbarians who were using these one-edged, heavy swords.

A Roman could do like Zorro while they're getting ready to lift it and make another swath. Well, the Word of God is sharper even than that. This was the latest technology in cutting and in warfare.

And it's a very graphic image because you could split somebody open and see their joints and their marrow. And what does the Word of God do? It judges. It is a critic or judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

That's what God looks at. Why do we do what we do? There is no creature hidden from His sight. All things are open and laid bare.

We can fool each other, and we can look cheerful when we're not. We can look willing when we're not. We can look righteous when we're not.

But all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Ultimately, we all have to do with God. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

And every thought and every word will be judged on the basis of why we thought it, why we said it. The actions, why did we do them? Actions do not carry intrinsic righteousness. Motivations are credited with righteousness.

And, of course, the motivation. This is why the first and greatest commandment in the Old Testament was a motivation. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.

And then love your neighbor as yourself. Because when you do what you do out of love for God and the love that we have for each other, when it is tied to and a part of and an extension of our love for God, there are unbelievers who love their families or who love their friends or who love their fellow man and will go out and altruistically try to join the Peace Corps and help people in underdeveloped countries and things. They say, well, I'm doing this because I love these people.

I feel for them. I look at their plight and I have great sympathy for them. That's not the love that's

talked about in the second commandment that is like unto the first.

Love your neighbor as yourself. This is love that is an outgrowth, an extension. It is part and parcel of love for God.

You love someone on the basis of your love for God and God's love for them, not just a human sympathy. So Jesus pointed that out. And it is that thought and intent of the heart that counts.

Well, as we return to our study in Ecclesiastes, we find that in Chapter 3, the passage where we are currently excavating, if you will, this is what Solomon has concluded. He started this book saying, you know, everything is temporary and transient. Stuff doesn't last.

You can work your fingers to the bone. You can build an empire. You can build a family.

You can build gardens and palaces and things. And you just can't take it with you. Nothing lasts.

It's all hevel, vapor. Has anybody got any vapor with them? Have you all got vapor in your purse? If I've got vapor, I may have vapor in my wallet. But do you have vapor that you carry around? You don't run around.

They don't can vapor. You don't go down to the store and get a bottle of vapor. You can't possess it.

You can't retain it. Vapor is in the air, and it's gone. If you get into the physics of it, temperature and pressure, one thing or another.

We were looking at my book, Weather for the Mariner, which I got way back when I was a midshipman, and they were trying to teach us about storms and tropical depressions and things. And they talk about the fact that the water that's present in the air, and that's what vapor is, the amount that the air can hold is dependent exclusively on the temperature of the air. The hotter the air, the more vapor it can hold.

If there's a lot of vapor in the air, and you cool the air, that vapor is going to condense and fall out because cold air can't sustain as much moisture as warm air. This is the basis for rain and fog and clouds and everything we see in the atmosphere that has to do with vapor. But if you've ever been in a fog, and you reach out your hand and try to grab ahold of the fog and take it in and show it to your child, you can't do it.

Vapor, by its nature, its outstanding characteristic is its ineffability. It can't be grasped. And that's what Solomon starts out talking about.

We want to find the thing that has substance. We want to find the thing that lasts. That is the prophet.

What is the prophet, Solomon asks to a man for all of his labor, that he labors with, under the

sun. Under the sun means in the limits of his earthly life. You're born and you die.

In between then, you do a lot of work. Well, what do you have to show for it? Let me ask you this. You think about household work.

Single people all do it for themselves. They do their own laundry. They do their own dishes.

Ladies do laundry and do dishes. You think about... I think about ladies that are older and all of the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of loads of laundry that have been done all through the production of a family and all the way up to the present. You still have to do your own laundry even after the family is gone.

Well, do you have anything to show for all of those loads of laundry? You can say, well, you know, back in the day my kids looked clean and there was hygiene involved and so forth. But right now, what do you have that you can show somebody and say, for all of these 7,532 loads of laundry that I've done in the last umpteen years, here's what I have to show for it. It was great at the time, but right now you've got nothing to show for all of that work.

And you can pick any category of labor and when you die, you don't cash in your chips and take something away. They just take away your chips when you die and it's all over under the sun. This is what Solomon says.

He says, death is the exit door and they don't let you carry anything out. So where is the permanent thing? And by the time you get to chapter 3, and he says there is a time for every worthwhile goal. He talks about the times and the seasons.

All of these different things that are done, what is the point? How can you take away something that lasts? And by the time we get to the middle of the chapter, he starts to tell us. And the translation that I gave you beginning in verse 9 goes back to the question that was asked at the beginning of the book. What prophet? It's the very same Hebrew word, Yitron.

Yitron means after you balance the books, what do you have left over? What is the prophet? What prophet does the doer have in that which he himself labors? And the word labor is Amal, the very same word we had at the beginning. But the word doer here is a participle from the Hebrew verb Asah. Asah means to make or to do.

And in this context, in this chapter, every instance of this word, and there are quite a few, it has to do with what you accomplish. It's not manufacture. The verb is used of God when He took the rib from Adam and He Asah'd a woman.

And that was creating something from something. But that's not what's in view here. Asah in this context means that which you accomplish.

You produce something. What prophet does the doer have in that which he himself labors?

Solomon says in verse 10, I have seen, and you might underline or circle that phrase because the Bible often just tells us things, doesn't it? Or the author of a book. He'll just come out and say, this is the way it is.

The author of Hebrews, he doesn't say, I know that the Word of God is alive and powerful. Or I have seen that the Word of God is alive and powerful. Does he? He just comes out and states it as a blank declarative sentence.

But here when the author sort of intrudes himself into the picture and says, I have seen this, he's saying this is based on my experience. Well, this book is about Solomon's experience. He says, look, I was wiser, richer, smarter, more powerful than anybody else in the day, and I'm telling you from my experience, this is what I have seen.

So in verse 10 he says, I have seen the answer which God has given to the sons of men to be answered with. What do you mean answer? Well, answer to the question of verse 9, where is the prophet? God says, well, I know what answer God has given to the sons of men to be answered with. And he said this in chapter 1. But now in verse 11 he introduces something new.

After giving us all the content of chapter 1 and chapter 2, and that no matter what you do, it goes to another, you can't keep it, and so on. I have seen the answer which God has given to the sons of men. Everything He has done, and this is the verb *asah*.

So now we've got *asah* used both for man. What prophet does the man who does things have from all his labor? Solomon says in verse 11, everything He, God, has done. It's the same verb, *asah*.

Everything God has done is beautiful in its time. Now this is a change from the translation I gave you last week because when you're working from all of the New American Standard, New King James, you tend to be influenced by, and they say He has made everything beautiful in its time. And they're switching over to the other use of *asah*, to make, like when God made Eve from Adam's rib.

But I went back, I told you all last week I was going to put this translation down on paper and print it out for you. So as I was going through it and fine tooth combing it and making sure it was exactly as close to the Hebrew as I could get it, I hit verse 11 and I realized I hadn't been quite as diligent as I should have been. I sort of just got by osmosis this He has made everything beautiful in its time.

And when I was going back through it again, this is literally what it says. Everything He has done is beautiful in its time. That's word for word out of the Hebrew.

It doesn't say He makes everything beautiful. It's a perfect tense. Everything He, God, has done is beautiful in its time.

And that in its time goes back to the beginning of chapter 3. There's a time for this and a time for that. Well, everything God has done is beautiful in its time. There's a time that God brings things about.

I used to wonder about that when I was single. I was 17, 18, 19, and when I got to be 20, I thought, well, you know, this is time. You're going to be meeting somebody and getting married here pretty soon.

I got to be 21 and 22 and 23 and 24 and 25 and 26 and 27 and 28 and 29 and I still wasn't married. And I thought I was studying the Bible and all this about the companion not good for man to be alone. And I knew I wasn't built.

You know, He says, well, there are some who are going to be celibate or eunuchs for the kingdom. I thought that is not me. I need... There is a missing... I am incomplete.

And I know God has somebody out there, but I didn't meet her and didn't meet her and didn't meet her. Well, I kept thinking about, well, God's timing. Everything is beautiful in its time.

God has the perfect time, the perfect place for things to happen. We think things ought to happen right now, but God has a perfect time. And when we adjust ourselves to His timing, when we reconcile ourselves to His timing, we find that it is beautiful.

When He brings it about, it's exactly the right time. And when I finally did meet the person that God had for me to get married, it was perfect. And I realized, and it's always easy to see in retrospect, that it took God 10 years to knock enough rough edges off of me that when I finally did meet my wife, I wouldn't mess it all up and drive her away with my faults.

And I was a far worse person 10 years before when I was 20 than I was at 30. And it finally dawned on me when I was about 26 or 27, I thought, you know, probably the reason God is waiting is that I'm not prepared. I am not yet ready to be... You always fantasize about somebody and how great they're going to be and you don't really stop and think, well, what about me? Somebody over there is fantasizing about somebody being great and maybe you're not it.

And God has got to work on you and try to raise you to the level to be worth this other person's time. So anyway, I say all that to say everything God has done is beautiful in its time. There is a perfect time.

And if something hasn't happened yet, just remember God's timing is perfect. And this is the verse that tells us that. But it doesn't say He makes everything beautiful in its time.

This sounds like, oh well, He can make our stuff beautiful in its time and so on. This is what God does that's beautiful, not what we do that He makes beautiful. His works are beautiful.

Also, God has given eternity in their hearts. Who's they? What's the nearest antecedent for a

masculine plural pronoun? It's in the previous verse 10. The sons of men.

He has given eternity in their hearts. This is olam. Olam means unto the ages.

It's translated forever. Without which man will not find or attain to the doing which God is doing from the beginning to the end. And these are two uses of asah again.

This is a contrast between what man does and what God does. What man does is temporary. It's a vapor.

It doesn't last. It may gratify at the moment, but you don't get any yitron. You don't get any profit.

What God does is what counts. And that's what we need to find. It's what we need to attain to.

And in order for us to find it, in order for us to discover it, and realize it, and comprehend it, God has to put eternity in our hearts. He has to give us a sense of there's got to be more to life than what I see around me. And that's what He does.

Everybody comes to that conclusion. There's got to be more to life than just doing the laundry 7,536 times. There's more to life than that.

It's more than just making sure my family's got clean clothes. And that is in fact true. God has put that knowledge in our hearts.

And if we don't acknowledge that truth, we're never going to find out what God is doing from the beginning to the end. That's what verse 11 tells us. Well, we need to pause here at this point because Solomon's going to pick up in verse 12 and say, I know something else.

And once again, I have seen, I know, I know, I have seen. We've got those four phrases in the space of as many verses here in chapter 3. But if there's one conclusion to draw from this review, it is this. It's what God does that counts.

God assigns righteousness. We do not produce righteousness. We don't do good things.

Based on what we think, based on the thoughts and intents of our hearts, our motivations, God assigns righteousness. It's what He does that's beautiful in its time. So we want to be in the place where God can do that in our lives, assign us righteousness.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll resume at verse 12.