

01-06-10b Ecclesiastes

We're ready now to resume our study. We find ourselves in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, where for the first time after spending two and a half chapters talking about life under the sun and the impermanence and the impossibility of laying hold of anything that is lasting, Solomon is now talking about God and talking about Him in earnest. He says that the answer that God has given to the sons of men to be answered with, He has seen.

This is verse 10. I have seen the answer. The question is, where is the profit to the doer in which he labors? Back in chapter 1, Solomon said, I have seen the answer which God gives to the sons of men.

And that first answer is a negative answer. You can't acquire any profit on your own. There is nothing we can do to achieve something of eternal value.

And Solomon says, I looked at all of these. You think, well, if you do something big enough or grand enough or beneficent enough or altruistic enough or beneficial to others enough, that will be something that lasts and stands the test of time. And Solomon says, look, I was the king in Jerusalem.

I had unlimited funds. I had unlimited authority. I had plenty of time.

I did all of these great works. I went in for things that produced pleasure. I went in for things that are construction projects and gardens and aesthetic beauty and everything else.

And I didn't come away with any profit. So he returns to the question and he says, after talking about the things for which there is a time and a season, he says, so now back to the question, what profit does the doer have in that which he himself labors? He says, I have seen the answer which God has given the sons of men to be answered with. The first part of the answer was, you can't do it yourself.

Here's the second part of the answer. Everything God has done is beautiful in its time. He has put eternity in their hearts, without which, and some of this Hebrew is really difficult and I've had to make two or three passes through it to really smooth it out.

I told you, it begins with, from the lack of which, man will not find out. But there are parallel usages of this malay construction and it essentially means without. From the lack of which basically means without which.

Without which, so this eternity that's in our hearts, this sense of the eternal, this knowledge that there is something more, it's tied directly to the knowledge that there is a God that Paul talks about in Romans chapter one. Without that knowledge, and this means God has put it there, but you can ignore it. You can suppress it, you can suppress that truth.

In fact, let's turn real quickly to Romans chapter one and just review. It's been a few years since we looked at this concept, but the thing that's amazing is Solomon is talking about these deep truths back in the Old Testament days, before we had an apostle Paul, before the Lord Jesus Christ came, before the unfolding plan of God was revealed in the detail to which we have it now. Solomon, in his investigation of how to transcend life under the sun, comes to this conclusion.

But take a look in Romans chapter one, verse 18. He says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Well, suppress what truth? Well, he says in verse 19, because the reason the wrath of God is revealed against these people who suppress the truth is that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them.

Let me switch over. I'm looking at the New American Standard. We'll look at it in the New King James, since that's what most of y'all are reading.

What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. This is the knowledge of the eternal. This is why we are all accountable.

People actually believe that it would be better to not give the gospel to someone, because if you tell them the gospel, now they're accountable. And if they reject it, they'll be going to the lake of fire. But if they never hear the gospel, and they never really confront the issue of Jesus Christ, and then something happens to them and they die, well, they'll go to heaven and be with God.

So don't go make them responsible. Keep them in a state of ignorance, because ignorance is bliss, and then God will have to take them to heaven. And it's a completely faulty, weirdo point of view, because everyone is accountable.

Helen Keller, you remember that story, the miracle worker, and you go through that whole thing where she had already gotten to a certain stage of development before anyone was able to communicate with her. And when her teacher, Anne Bancroft, finally got through to Patty Duke there and finally got in and was able to communicate with the signing to this deaf and blind girl, and once they were able to establish enough vocabulary to talk about deeper things, her teacher was astonished to discover, because she was a believer and she was going to give Helen the gospel, that she started talking to her about God. And Helen Keller said, I already know that there's a God.

And the first person to ever give the gospel to Helen Keller, who had had no outside contact with anything, she already knew that there was a God. And she told her teacher so in the very first conversation they had. She said, I know all about God.

I've been curious to know more about Him. And so the teacher gave her the gospel, and she was saved. What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, this is everyone. Everyone knows that there is a God. But what do you do with that knowledge? Do you suppress the truth in unrighteousness, as it says in verse 18? Or do you acknowledge that truth and respond to it in faith? Everyone has the knowledge.

Everyone is without excuse. You're either going to suppress that truth, or you're going to respond to it. These that Paul is talking about, these to whom God has been made manifest, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful.

But they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. That light of illumination, that knowledge of the eternal that God puts in the heart shines there until a person makes their response. And if their response is rejection, that light is going to go out.

God is not going to sit there and continue to shine the light of the knowledge of Himself in the heart of someone who rejects it and says, I'm not interested. Leave me alone. I don't see where you need to be assigned any glory.

I don't see where I owe you any gratitude. So they do not glorify God. They're not thankful.

They became futile in their thoughts. And this word for futility in verse 21 is the Greek word related to mataiotes. It's the verb form.

Mataiotes, you may remember, is the vacuum in the soul. It's emptiness. And so their foolish hearts were darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God. These are people who had the glory of God in their possession and traded it away, exchanged it for an image made like corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, creeping things. And it is because of this, verse 24 says, that God gave them up to uncleanness.

You have all of these discussions going around about how homosexuals are born that way and they can't change and this, that, and the other. Well, people who are in the grip of an evil or an immorality or a pattern of behavior like that don't have the power without God. Those who acknowledge God, God can and will give them the power to change.

But if they exchange the glory of God for something else, even if they come to Christianity, profess Christianity, but they're just using it as the means to an end, it's another illustration of why do you do what you do. Do you think you have a problem and you just want God to be the big band-aid, the big Excedrin pill to solve it for you? That is not motivation that is going to be declared righteous in God's sight. God is not there to be the genie of the lamp to grant people's wishes.

God can and does bless and grant the desires of one's heart, but it's not because we went to Him and that was the reason we went. Oh, so you're the big Santa Claus in the sky. Well, here's my list for Christmas.

And God says, oh, well, I'm so glad you came to sit on my lap. I'll just grant your Christmas list. That's not satisfactory.

It is acknowledging the glory of God. It is having gratitude to God for who and what He is and what He has done and what He's provided to us through Jesus Christ. And no other motivation will do.

The action of coming to God or coming to the Bible or coming to church is insufficient. Why are you doing that, God asks. And if it is not love for Him, if it's not a desire to glorify and be thankful to Him, no credit.

And because these know God but don't glorify Him, aren't really thankful, they're futile in their thoughts. What does it mean to be futile in your thoughts? It means you're pursuing your own agenda. You're just there, you know, if God will fit in and promote your agenda, well, I'll go ahead and include Him in.

But if His stuff ever starts interfering with my agenda, then I'm going to include Him out. Well, they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God into corruptible things. Therefore, God gave them up.

And all of this, the images of man, birds, and this is idolatry, right? And what is idolatry? It's covetousness. Why do people make and worship idols? Because they think it will influence their fate. They think it will influence their future.

It's not just the making of an image. It's not just the carving of a statue. It is thinking that by doing that, you're going to get better crops.

Your wife is going to be more fertile and bear you more children. You're going to have power over your enemies. You're going to prosper and have good things.

You covet, you desire things that you don't have, and you think that by worshiping this God or by doing this action, you're going to get them. It's like belief in magic or belief in luck or belief in omens and that you can do these things and influence the future. You want something, and to ensure that you get it, you do these things.

That's why Paul says, idolatry is covetousness. That's what idolatry really is. Well, that's what the author is referring to here.

If you exchange the glory of the incorruptible God, meaning you subordinate yourself to the glory of God, His plan, His purpose, His existence, into images, into idolatry, and you basically say,

well, I want what I want, and if I can kind of hook up with God to get it, well, so much the better. God gave them up to uncleanness in the lusts of their heart. This is the desires of the heart that was referred to by that image-making up above.

He gives them up to uncleanness. He says, you're wanting to seek prosperity, you're wanting to seek happiness, you're wanting to seek achievement and accomplishment or riches, whatever it is. Okay, you just go have that.

I'm going to take my hands off. I'm going to not keep shining this light in your heart. You just go do that.

So he gives them up to those things. It's uncleanness because it's not related to God. It's the desires of their heart to dishonor their bodies among themselves, and in a lot of these areas there is degeneracy.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about this special I saw about the high school bunch that all got syphilis from dishonoring their bodies among themselves, looking for a thrill, looking for something to do. Verse 25, "...who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." And this is an easy thing to do. A lot of times people get involved in service and in ministry and in saying, well, it's the people that are so important.

And really Christianity is all about healing and about wholesomeness and about ministry and about love for your fellow man and so forth. And love for your fellow man is meaningless. An unbeliever can do it unless it is an extension and outgrowth of love for God.

We love because He first loved us, the scripture says. And if you worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, and you're all about serving people and putting people first, you've missed the mark, you've missed the point, even as a believer. "...exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and for this reason God gave them up to vile passions." It goes on and talks about that.

They receive in themselves the penalty of their error, which was due. Verse 28, "...even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." God put the knowledge of Himself there. They didn't want to retain it.

Push it into a corner someplace. Let the cobwebs accumulate. "...God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful." All of the maladies, you know, this guy that came to the door was saying, wouldn't it be great if people would just do what the Bible says, wouldn't the world be a better place? If you don't retain the knowledge of God in your heart, look at the result.

Do you want to fix what's wrong in the world? Do you think that these are a big part of the problem? Well, it's not. Well, let's all go out and try to do what the Bible says. You've got to get below that to the foundation, and the foundation is Jesus Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not understand who Jesus Christ is. They don't acknowledge Him as divine. They don't believe that He was physically resurrected.

They don't understand salvation. They don't understand redemption or reconciliation or propitiation. They don't understand life in Christ, and Christ is the way.

You don't understand the Father. And you're not retaining the knowledge of God in your heart, and that's their problem. And so all of these strife and murder and deceit, and you notice that murder and sexual immorality is in the same list as whispering and boasting and being untrustworthy.

To God, it's all the same. It's all sin and evil. Verse 32, "...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do they do the same, but they also approve of those who practice them." They approve of others.

People get together in groups and mutually admire one another in doing these things. Well, this is what Solomon is talking about in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 when he says that God has put the knowledge of Himself in their hearts. He has put eternity in their hearts.

So that creates responsibility, because once we know, we're responsible for responding. Now, without that knowledge, man is not going to find or attain to the doing which God is doing. Then in verse 12, and it says the doing, this is ma'aseh, which is the noun form of asah, which means to do.

It's the same word that's been used before. This is verse 11, "...everything that God has done," asah, "...is beautiful," yafei, "...in its time." He's put eternity in their hearts. He's given eternity in their hearts, "...without which man will not find," i.e., man will not attain to, "...the doing which God is doing." This is ma'aseh and asah.

They're both from the same word, "...the doing which God is doing, "...from the beginning and to the end." They won't understand what God has done in the past. They won't understand what God will do in the future. It doesn't make any sense.

Then verse 12, Solomon says once again, he puts himself in the picture when he says, "...I know that there is nothing good in them." He doesn't just say there is nothing good in them. He says, "...I know that there is nothing good in them." "...Because if he," this is man, "...were to rejoice or to do good in his life, "...and also every man who eats and drinks "...and sees good in all his labor, "...it is a thing given by God." I had to work on verse 13 because that last phrase, you would think, well, if you're rejoicing and doing good in your life, if you're eating and drinking and

seeing good in your labor, well, that ought to have some intrinsic value. That ought to have some good.

But Solomon says, no, even if a man does that, there is nothing good in man. Even when we rejoice, even when we do good in our life, when we're eating and drinking and seeing good in all of our labor, "...it is a thing given by God." And that word that's translated, "...it," there, "...it is a thing given by God," is feminine. It's a feminine pronoun.

And if you go and you're paying attention to gender in Hebrew, *to* is a masculine noun. Labor and all of these other things are all masculine. And then here's this feminine pronoun.

If you translate this literally, "...every man who eats and drinks "...and sees good in all his labor, "...she is a thing given by God." And you say, well, what is she? And you go back and look for an antecedent noun that's in the feminine gender. And there isn't one. And when that happens, that means that the pronoun is referring to everything you said.

It's sort of like Ephesians 2, 8, and 9. Remember that? "...For by grace you have been saved through faith, "...and that not of yourselves, "...it is a gift of God." Well, when it talks about, "...it is a gift of God," that it is a neuter in Greek. And all of the other things, grace, faith, and being saved and all that, those all have a gender. And so if he was saying, "...faith is not of yourselves, "...it is the gift of God." This is the way the Calvinists like to take it.

You've been saved by faith, "...and that not of yourselves, "...it, faith, is the gift of God." Well, the problem is, faith is a gendered noun, and it is neuter, and they don't match. And so it does not refer to faith, nor does it refer to grace. And so when it's neuter and all these others are gendered, it means everything preceding is what's being talked about.

The whole process of salvation by grace through faith is not of man's invention. That whole opportunity for salvation is a gift of God, and not from works. We don't come up with it, lest anyone should boast.

Same thing here. It, this whole idea that we have nothing good in us, and even when we rejoice and we do good works, we eat and drink, we see good in our labor, it is a thing given by God. The only reason we're even here to eat and drink, the only reason we have any enjoyment or any rejoicing, is because God allows it.

God gives it. So we can't claim credit for it. If we do good, if we see good, if we enjoy something, we want to take it to ourselves and say, look at this great thing that I have done.

Look at this accomplishment. But He says, look, anything you have, anything that you've done, it's only because of the gift of God that you even have it. How can you try to take credit to yourself and say, this is a credit I can go beyond the setting of the sun with, because look at this great thing.

What do you have that you did not receive? He says later on. So then in verse 14, He says once again, I know that everything God will do, and this is the imperfect from Asa once again, and the imperfect puts it into the future here. I know that everything that God will do, it will be to eternity.

La'olam. It's a part of the eternal. That same eternal that God put in our hearts.

Everything God will do will be to eternity. There is nothing to add to it, and there is nothing to diminish from it. For God has done that which they, the sons of men, will fear from before His face.

When men come face to face with God, they look at their accomplishments and they look at God's accomplishments, it's going to produce fear. What God has done is so awesome, it's so perfect, it is so complete, so comprehensive. Yare is the Hebrew verb for fear.

And when men see what God has done compared to what they've done, their stuff diminishes into microscopic invisibility. It's what God has done that counts. It's eternal.

It is complete and comprehensive. God has done that which they will fear before His face. That's what it literally says in verse 14.

What is has already been. That which will be already is. God will intensively seek that which is pursued.

God is going to examine the thoughts and intents of the heart. That is what verse 15 says. Any of this that you want to offer up, remember in Revelation chapter 20 at the great white throne judgment, men are going to be judged according to what? According to their works.

According to what they have done. And when those books are opened and what they have done is brought forward, people are going to fear in the face of God because they are going to see how utterly insignificant and worthless human accomplishment is in the face of what God has accomplished. All of the things that we take pride in, we say, oh well, but you know I've done this and I've always done that.

I've got these accomplishments and these credits to my account. When the books are opened and men are judged according to their works, Solomon says, compared to what God has done, it's going to cause people to just be afraid. To have even thought.

There are so many people that think, well, I've had some bad things, but I've got some good things also and it will all kind of balance out. Solomon says, any good things you've done, you're going to be scared to death when you stand before God compared to what He has done. God will intensively seek what you were pursuing.

What was your goal? What was the thought and intent of your heart when you did what you did? It's not the accomplishment, it's what you thought when you were doing it. You say, okay, that's

all well and good for Romans and for Ecclesiastes, but I'm going to fold up my Bible and get busy and live the rest of my life here in a few minutes. But the question is, as we perform each task that we perform, are we acknowledging God? Romans 1, are we thankful to God that we're alive and able to do the things that we do? When we do things for others, is it with a view toward the love that God has for us and the love that we have for Him, that we do what we do for others? Are we giving with strings attached? Are we expecting? Are we paying off some real or imagined debt? Why do we do what we do? That's what God evaluates.

Every waking moment of the day. And that is what establishes righteousness because God assigns righteousness. We do not produce it.

The whole book of Romans, you remember that long study we went through. Righteousness comes by trusting God. God gives the righteousness of Christ to those who trust Him, to those who do what they do in faith because they understand the Word of God and they know why they're doing what they do.

They do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. If we do things with expectations or with a view to what people are going to think or what people are going to do in response, we just forfeited our opportunity to be assigned righteousness in that case. And so our life becomes a daily, minute by minute, hour by hour challenge to be sure that our motivation is pure, that our heart is pure.

And that isn't something we can decide to do. It's something that God does in us. God is at work in you how? To will and to do His good pleasure.

God is at work in you. God is at work, asah. God is doing within you to will and to do His good pleasure.

That's why we're here. We're not here only to evangelize. We're not here only to minister.

We are primarily here to be a fruitful branch. And that fruit is produced by faith doing every minute task of the day because of God, because of His love for us, because of His grace toward us, because of the opportunity that we recognize to turn time into eternity, to produce something that is a profit that goes beyond the setting of the sun. That glorifies God.

That pleases God and accomplishes His purpose. And it's our great opportunity as believers every day that we live. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You that You, in grace, have saved us. You have not only rescued us from condemnation and from an awful eternal fate, but You have assigned meaning and purpose to our lives. You've given us the opportunity to be a reflection of Your glory, to be examples of Your power in being transformed and having our corrupt nature transformed, of producing a righteousness through faith, of being assigned righteousness by faith so that what we do

transcends the moment, it transcends the task and is an example of Your power to transform corrupt natures into that which is incorruptible.

We pray that we will be reminded daily that God the Holy Spirit will show us where we tend to lose sight of who we are and why we're here. We pray that the work that the Lord Jesus Christ has done on our behalf, the sacrifice that He made on the cross for us will be vindicated when we live our lives in a way that is pleasing to You and glorifying to Him. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.