

01-06-24b Ecclesiastes

Well, I particularly enjoy that hymn because it reminds me of something that we've studied in the past. That rattling noise is my head hitting the lampshade, by the way. The reference to the river that flows from the throne of God is from Revelation chapter 22, where John says about the angel, who is his tour guide, he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the middle of its street on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and there will be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. Another reminder that there's activity that goes on in the eternal kingdom of the Father.

The servants are serving, there are things being accomplished, there are things being done, and the nations need healing, and that's why the leaves are there. They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. There will be no night there, they need no lamp or light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever.

But just preceding that reference to the water of the river of life, in verse 22-27, it talks about the New Jerusalem. It doesn't have a temple, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, has no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, because the glory of God illuminates it, the Lamb is its light. The nations of those who are delivered shall walk in its light, the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day, there shall be no night there, and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. I think there's some textual problems you could straighten out there in the New King James, but look at verse 27, there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. And it is a reminder that not everyone is going to have unrestricted access to the New Jerusalem, even in the eternal state there are going to be consequences for decisions that are made in this life.

And that goes back to Revelation chapter 21, where when you look at verse 7, he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. And of course their part doesn't mean that's their destination or their fate, part is the Greek word meros, it is a technical word for the estate, the portion of the estate that is granted to you by a will or a last testament.

And those who have practiced evil as believers, they don't lose their salvation, but they have no

inheritance. Their inheritance is the smoke that ascends from the lake of fire, and that's where their heritage is. And you have a similar idea in Revelation chapter 22, where you have the river of life, and then in verse 12 of chapter 22 of Revelation, behold, I am coming quickly, my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work.

I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, blessed are those who do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. It's not automatic for every believer, it's the obedient who will have the right to enter. Whether outside or dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, whoever loves and practices a lie.

Well there's not going to be dogs and sorcerers and people loving and practicing lies in the eternal kingdom of the Father. These are people who committed themselves to this way in this life. All of that people who might be tempted to do that kind of thing are already in the lake of fire at this point, but this is the lasting penalty for those who trampled underfoot the Son of God and disregarded the Spirit of Grace.

It is a serious thing to be unwilling or indifferent to the calling of God in this life. We have a great opportunity and to miss it is to miss a lot, not only now but also in the millennial kingdom and beyond. There isn't any getting around.

People say, well this is sort of a hypothetical, it just means nobody is going to crawl out of the lake of fire and go staggering into the gates or something and get the leaves and heal themselves. It's not what it's talking about at all. Blessed are those who do his commandments.

To whom do the commandments apply? Not the unsaved, it's the saved. There's only one issue for unsaved people and that's faith in Christ and his work on the cross on our behalf. It is believers who are commanded to be and to do.

It is based on that that privilege and blessing and reward is going to be based in the eternal future. There is not enough attention paid in my estimation to the end of Revelation. Anyway, and you might also note, I mentioned it in the first lesson this morning that we are not judged according to our works, we are judged according to what we think, our thoughts, our words are brought into judgment and yet here it says to give everyone according to his work.

Well the judgment seat of Christ is where our wood, hay and stubble are weeded out. And the righteousness that is the eternal weight of glory is identified at that point. This system of reward, that of course is seven years before the millennial kingdom begins.

The judgment seat of Christ for us begins at the rapture or just immediately thereafter. But then we are with Christ, the wedding if you will with the Lord Jesus Christ during the time of the tribulation. Then we return with him as his bride, the faithful, the overcomers will rule and reign with Christ.

You have the thousand year millennial reign, then you have the Gog Magog rebellion, you have the casting of the minions of darkness into the lake of fire, Satan and the beast and the false prophet. One of them gets tossed in ahead of time, I have to review which one. But after that, then you have the great white throne judgment.

Satan and his bunch are already in the lake of fire, then the dead are raised, the unbelievers, they are judged and they join Satan in the lake of fire. Then the kingdom of the Father begins. And that is what is in view in these last few chapters of Revelation, the new Jerusalem is in the kingdom of the Father.

And it is there where based on what we have done in this life as believers there is going to be a system of classification, there are going to be levels just as there are with God's angels now. All angels are not created equal. All angels are not given equal responsibility or equal power or equal privilege.

Some angels have access to God's throne and others do not. It is fascinating to study when you go back to Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28 and you see the fall of Lucifer, how did he do that? He was brokering influence. He was influence peddling among the angels because he had access to God's throne room as the guardian cherub and many other angels did not.

So if they wanted issues brought to the throne of God, they would come to Satan. It was through the multitude of his commerce. He was trading in influence as a part of what produced his fall.

But that is another subject. But whenever I hear, shall we gather at the river, it seems like one of those old songs from the saints of the 1800s, they are sitting there watching some dear departed being laid to rest and shall we gather, it is all about well, we will all. But the river that flows from the throne of God, this is not the resurrection.

Most people are thinking about, well, the dear departed is being laid to rest here but I will see him again, some glad day. But this is more than a millennium after that. This is the throne of the father and of the lamb and the river that comes from beneath it.

This doesn't happen in Jerusalem. This is in the New Jerusalem. And yet, even then, it just always leads my mind down the same track because I think there are all these wonderful things coming and when I was growing up, I was always taught that we will all be, everybody will be happy over there and we are all going to be walking the streets of gold and pearly gates and this and the other.

Not so. Anytime you hear, shall we gather at the river, you ought to be thinking, I hope I am going to be gathering at the river and not outside with the dogs and the sorcerers. Who wants to hang out with them? What kind of an eternal future are you going to have out there with all the ne'er-do-wells, all the ones that missed it? I don't want to be out there with the Caiaphas and the Pharisees and all the other failures.

I want to see the throne and I want to see the water. I want to see those trees. Anyway, this is oddly enough what Solomon is angling for in his generation, Kohelet, the one who is issuing a call to people.

People I mentioned in the introduction to the book study that a lot of people think that Kohelet means the gatherer of Proverbs or something, but that verb, kahal, is only used of gathering people. He's issuing a call. He's saying, wake up.

You've got eternity in your hearts. God has told you there's more to life than just getting in the crops and having a good harvest and providing for your family and being well thought of in the community. There's more to life than that.

Solomon says, I've done all of these things to excess. I know what I'm talking about. So by the time we get to chapter 8, I'm thinking of something else, we're in chapter 3. By the time we get to verse 9 and following, we've reviewed that down to verse 16, and Solomon says, under the sun, in this life, there are a lot of things we can't fix.

Just as he did when he says, what prophet, and he was harking back to what he introduced in chapter 1. What is the prophet to a man? Everything seems to go on as it always has. And he also harks back here in verse 16 where he says, I saw this under the sun, in this life, things aren't the way they should be. What is crooked cannot be straightened.

What is lacking cannot be numbered. It can't be measured. The world is a broken place.

And if you're looking for vindication and if you're looking for justice and if you're expecting, and this is a component of a lot of teaching in the church today. If you are doing the right thing, if you're writing a check to some Christian ministry, if you're praying a lot, if you're getting the ghost and getting the second blessing, if you're doing this, that, and the other, you do certain things for God, God's going to open the windows of heaven. If you tithe, tithing is real big in some quarters.

And there's not a thing in the world wrong with tithing, if somebody wants to do it. There's not a thing in the world wrong with not tithing, if you don't want to do it. It's one of those areas of discretion that depends entirely on why you do what you do.

I've been asked several times, well, should believers tithe? And the question is, yes and no. It's like saying, should believers share the gospel with someone? Well, yes and no. There's a time to share and a time not to share.

There may be a time to tithe and there may be a time not to tithe. But one thing is for sure, the popular gospel is being preached that, well, if you tithe, bring your tithes into the storehouse and the windows of heaven will open, why are you doing what you're doing? I want a better economic status. I want a better life than I've got.

I'm dissatisfied and if I mail off some money here, things are going to get better. Well, Solomon says, look, under the sun, in the place of judgment, I see wickedness. I see crime.

In the place of righteousness, I see crime. It's criminal. It's not just bad.

It's not just weak. It's criminal what happens. And we've all gotten frustrated at the things that we see.

I get frustrated at the ticket I got for running a red light when it was only by my expert driving and cat-like reflexes that I avoided having a wreck. And it just so happened that the policeman who looked over his shoulder and saw me sailing through the light thought I was just late for work or something and didn't see the van that ran me into the oncoming lane, didn't see me bumping over the speed bumps, trying valiantly to get out of the way of this two lanes of traffic coming my direction, trying to beat the light. And anyway, there's lots of things that can be frustrating.

So, he sees this and he says, I see these wrong conditions. And even as the king, Solomon can't fix them. So he says in his heart, concerning the condition of the sons of men, and then in the New King James it says, God tests them that they may see that they themselves are like animals.

Well, I didn't find a way for that to blend into the flow of thought. And when you take a look at what Solomon actually wrote in Hebrew here, it says something slightly different. Verse 18, translated as literally as I can get it for you, I said in my heart, on the matter of the sons of men, this is the word matter, translated matter or subject is the word *dabar*, and it literally means word.

But it comes to mean subject or matter, issue, some concept that you want to address. I said in my heart, on the matter of the sons of men, then this would be like quote marks if you were writing this down in English, to, the next word is an infinitive from the Hebrew verb *barar*, B-A-R-A-R. So if we skip that just for the moment, we would say to *barar* God, because it says *le*, then *barar*, which is the infinitive form, and then it says *Elohim*, which is God, and to see that they themselves are animals, they with reference to themselves.

The verb *barar* means to separate, to purge, to purify, or to clarify something. It does not mean to test. The rendition, the translation test, comes from the idea that well, if you're purging something, if you're subjecting it to some process by which it's going to be made better, but it doesn't really mean to test.

There are perfectly good words in Hebrew that mean to test, this isn't it, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, that's not the word here. The odd thing is the construction is really difficult, because it almost looks as though the word God, *Elohim*, is the object rather than the subject, because when you translate it in English here, they say to test them. It says that God is doing this to test them, but the word them is not there.

It would be real easy to put *chem* on the end of *barar*, *barar chem*, to test them, but it's not there.

And it's notable by its absence. So, if you translate this literally, it says God, to separate, or to purify, or to clarify, to purify is the translation we'll settle on, but this is to purify by separating.

You get the chaff out of the wheat. You get the lumps out of your silver that you're refining, or the gold that you're refining. You heat it up and skim off the top.

You're purifying, in later rabbinic usage, when they would write, they used this word as something being clear, if you want to make something clear. So, to purify, or to make clear, and to see that they themselves are animals. So, my translation is this.

I said in my heart, on the matter of the sons of men, it is to clarify God, and to see that they themselves are animals. I think God is the object of this verb, and not the subject. The construction is verb followed by object, and there's no suffix on the verb.

So, Solomon says, this whole issue of the answer that God gives to men, the distinction between what is earthly and what is heavenly, what is temporal and what is eternal. This whole issue of the sons of men. He says, this idea that there's injustice on the earth, but God is going to render justice in the future.

There's now, and there's eternity. There's things that can't be fixed now, but God is going to make everything right. This whole issue of the matter of the sons of men, what is it for? It is to separate God.

It's to clarify God. It's to show the distinction between God and man. And to show man that he himself is an animal.

The word animal here is behemoth, the singular B-E-H-E-M-A-H, behemoth. The feminine plural behemoth is our familiar word behemoth, which is often translated hippopotamus, which makes me chuckle, because it's about the furthest thing from the hippopotamus. Behemoth was a sea-dwelling denizen.

It was some form of aquatic dinosaur. It wasn't a hippo. The only thing they share in common is that they're aquatic and big.

So, this whole matter, why does God allow this? Why does God let there be injustice? Why is it that there's nothing left over? You can't take it with you, so to speak. Why does God give this unsatisfactory answer to the sons of men? Why have we waded through the first two and a half chapters of Ecclesiastes? It is to make clear God versus man. Man compared to God is like the animals compared to man.

It's the same kind of thing. Man has a higher essence, a higher consciousness, a higher level of existence than the animals. And behemoth is often translated cattle.

It's not so much the wild beasts. Behemoth is used in general of the land-dwelling domesticated

animals. It's sometimes translated ox or oxen, sometimes cattle, sometimes just a general word.

They're distinguished from birds and fish in some passages. But behemoth in general means the animals. Beasts kind of connotes in English the idea of, oh, you filthy beast, or you beast, and it means depraved and primitive and drooling fangs and that kind of thing.

Behemoth in Hebrew is a reference to a domesticated animal, generally cattle. And you think, well, here's these cattle lumbering around. I've watched cows.

There's lots of animals that are interesting. Cows are about as interesting as drying paint. All they do is just sit there or stand there, usually, and just ruminate.

They're just chewing the cud. They reach down and get a mouthful of grass. You know, calves can be interesting.

They'll frolic, they'll run around, they'll spook and play some. But a cow, your basic cows, they just kind of lumber around. They're just very dull.

Well, I said in my heart on the matter of the sons of men, it is to separate God and to see that they themselves, these men, are animals. And then there's a thing that's not even translated in your English there at the end of the sentence. And it's they with reference to themselves.

It's very difficult in Hebrew. In fact, some have thought that maybe it wasn't even supposed to be there. But it's Hema Lachem.

And Hema Lachem, Bahema, it all kind of rhymes. If you read this in Hebrew, it says to see, which is la-ra-ot, ra-ah, the verb to see. And then shahem, bahema, hema, lachem.

It's almost a sing song thing. Shahem, bahema, hema, lachem. And your English there just stops after bahema, to see that they are animals.

And it doesn't even translate, hema, lachem. Well, hema is the feminine word for them. And it goes back to bahema.

And then lachem is to them. So it's sort of of them to them. And when you try to put that all together, what you end up with is that this viewpoint, to separate, to clarify, to sanctify, if you will.

Purify is one of the meanings of this word barar. To sanctify God, which means to set Him apart, to show the distinction between God and man. And to see that they themselves are animals, they with reference to themselves.

In other words, man, looking at himself compared to God, is going to see himself like an animal. He says, wow, like the animals are to me, so I am to God. That's the idea.

And that's the point. On the subject of the sons of men, what is the point of all this? It is to acquire

humility. If you want this all rolled up into a nutshell, why does God give this unsatisfactory answer to men? Why does He show us that nothing we do lasts? That we can't transcend the setting of the sun? That we can't fix what's crooked, we can't fill in what's lacking? We can't get justice.

The best that we can do, we go to the place of justice and the place of righteousness. These are the highest levels of human civilization. You don't go to aboriginal tribes in Australia or Africa, and say, hey, could you help us settle our disputes? We're really looking for somebody that's... We go to the best legal system that's ever been devised.

We go to the United States Supreme Court. We've got a system of laws and lawyers and we take great pride in it. We say, if there's any place you can get justice, it's at the Supreme Court.

Appeal it to the highest level. There's no appeal from the Supreme Court. That's the highest.

And Solomon says, you look there and it's still screwed up. You go to the place of justice, it's screwed up, it's criminal. You go to the place of righteousness, it's screwed up, it's criminal.

Why does God allow this? What's the whole purpose of this subject? It's for man to see that there's a God, that He's holy, He's purified, He's separate. And we're not. When we look at ourselves, themselves with reference to themselves, they are animals.

We are just not good for much. We're limited. Compared to God, we're just animals.

And we can't control our own fate. We can't do anything about the problem of impermanence, of Hebel. Why is that? Look at verse 19.

New King James says, For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals. One thing befalls them, as one dies, so dies the other. That's not too bad.

My translation, like I can judge the translators of the King James, but this is my translation. And this is as literal as I can make it from the Hebrew. For there is what befalls the sons of men, and there is what befalls the animals.

And there is one thing that befalls them. There are things that befall men, and there are things that befall animals. But one thing befalls both of them, is what it's getting at.

Obviously, we're not like animals in every way. What's the specific way that we're like animals? What is it that men see when they compare themselves to God? God is eternal, and we're not. God is powerful, and we're not.

God can produce yafei, beautiful good, and we cannot. So, when you look at the sons of men and you look at animals, there's one thing that befalls them both. As one dies, so dies the other.

And there is one ruach to all. Ruach in Hebrew is variously translated breath or spirit. And I just

put them both in there with a slash between.

There is one spirit slash breath to all. And the remainder of man from animal. This is really great in Hebrew because it's a subtraction problem.

This is like a story problem in subtraction. If you subtract man from animal, the remainder is nothing. That's literally what this says.

The remainder of man from animal is nothing. Why? Because all is hevel. All is temporary.

Man thinks that he's produced so much, you listen to the evolution people and opposing thumb, and we've done this and we've done that, we've built civilization, we've got higher consciousness and philosophy and art and music and all of these things. Solomon says, when you boil it right down, you've got the same kind of life, man looking at man from a human perspective, when you die, you're just as dead as your pet dog or your pet cat. It's all temporary.

Verse 20, all are halak, to walk or to go. All are walking to one place. That's what it literally says.

You see the old cows? You used to see them walking in when they get fed and walking back out to the pasture, just lowing along and shambling. Well, all are walking to one place. The cows and the men.

You're just tramping down the road. All are from the dust and go to the dust. Verse 21, this is a very challenging question.

Who knows the ruach, the spirit slash breath? Who knows the ruach of the sons of men whose ascent is upward? This is a statement. And the spirit breath of the animals whose descent is downward to the earth. Solomon says, who knows this? There's a lot of people that don't know this.

When you look at the unbelieving world, even in the world of believers, there wasn't a common knowledge that the ascent of the spirit of man is upward. What does David say? My soul goes down to Sheol. I'm going to be in the place of no remembrance and no praise and so forth.

He said, will my soul go down to Sheol? Jonah in the belly of the whale, his prayer. The whale, the fish. When he's talking about the seaweed wrapping itself around his head, he says, I'm down in the depths.

I'm at the bottom of the sea at the gates of Sheol. My soul is going down to death. Solomon knows better.

He knows that the ascent of the ruach of man is upward and the descent of the spirit of beasts is downward to the earth. This is something he knows that perhaps his father David didn't even know. But the question is, who knows this? Who's going to come to the realization that there is

something about man that partakes of the eternal? God has put eternity in their hearts to know the work of God.

And it is knowing the work of God, it is coming to partake of the calling of God that solves this problem that is unsolvable by man. But God has put this situation before us to confront us with the fact that we've got eternal things to think about. So he concludes in verse 22, And I have seen, this is another first person verb, I have seen, he doesn't just make a dogmatic statement, he says this is what I've observed, There is nothing good from which man will rejoice from his doings.

This nothing better translation really does an injustice to the language here. He says, I have seen that there is nothing good from which man will rejoice from his doings. Man may rejoice in his doings, but there's nothing good, Solomon says.

I've seen nothing good from which man will rejoice from his doings. This is what we started out with, ma'aseh is from the verb asah, which means to make or do, that's the verb used of Eve being formed from man, asah, to manufacture something from something. There is nothing good from which man will rejoice from his doings, his ma'aseh.

Why? Because this itself is his portion. It's kind of like Jesus talking about the Pharisees strutting around on the street and he says they have their reward. This is his portion, this is his allotment.

For who will bring him to see what will be after him? When you go back to the end of verse 18, they with reference to themselves, God gives man this answer, gives him this condition, where he says, it's going to be worthless if I can't be here to see what comes after me. There is an answer to both of these questions. Who knows the spirit that goes up and the spirit that goes down? Who is going to bring him to see what will be after him? Actually, someone is going to bring him to see what is after him, isn't there? But initially, when you are coming to the issue of thinking about God and the things of God, you don't know that God is going to resurrect you, that God is going to bring you into judgment.

And the question is, who knows this? Who knows it in a way that makes a difference? If we remember that day by day as we do our doings, as we think our thoughts, we are going to be brought back up to review it later. It isn't immortality that we need, it is orientation to the plan and purpose of God and the judgment of God that we need to remember. You might think, well, if it just wasn't the setting of the sun, I could go on to see the benefit of all my works ad infinitum.

It's death that's the problem. Death is not the problem, it's the fact that the only real good is the good that God accomplishes. And we often fail to distinguish what we think is good and what we rejoice in and what God thinks is good and what God rejoices in.

For a saint, looking at the law of Moses, to come to this conclusion and to reach this level of insight is one of the marks of the great wisdom that God granted to Solomon because he asked

for it, because he prayed for it. And it is the same kind of insight that we can have if we ask for it, if we seek it, if we knock on the door and say, Lord, I really want my life to count for something. I don't want to just shuffle along at the end.

And my life was essentially like any other in terms of its production vanishing with the wind. We want to have a life that produces eternal fruit. We want to be those who walk by the side of the river of life, pluck a fruit off of those twelve trees.

But you have to do something. You have to make, there's a lot of talk about commitment, but we really do have to commit ourselves to seeking the fulfillment of God's calling in this life. And that's the challenge that we get in Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes.

We'll resume in Chapter 4 next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying your Word together. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enlighten us, we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.