

01-07-15a Ecclesiastes

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the wonderful opportunities that we have each day because you sustain us by your grace.

And even if we fail and fall short, you have provided even for that. We can be restored, we can be renewed, we can be cleansed. And we begin each day with a fresh, clean sheet of paper on which to write our thoughts and intentions, our decisions and our actions.

We pray today that as we spend time together in fellowship and in your word, that God the Holy Spirit will cleanse us and renew us, that the principles and the doctrines and the promises that we see in your word will refresh and restore our souls and strengthen us and enable us to live the life that you have called us to. We thank you for our nation and for the government that ensures our freedom and our opportunities to live without harassment or persecution. We thank you for the safety and the comfort that we enjoy.

We have so many great luxuries. We are probably living better than Solomon in all his glory. And we thank you that because we are free from a large portion of what others have faced and even do face in other parts of the world, we have more opportunities to avail ourselves of the presence of your word and the resources that enable us to understand it and put it into application.

We ask your blessing on those who are not with us this morning. We pray that you will be with them. And for all those who join in fellowship with us by means of tape, we ask that you will provide a special blessing for them both now and in the future so that all of us together can be growing up to the stature of a mature man, as it says in Ephesians, and that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We pray your blessing on us as we study together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is normally the place where we have our Scripture reading, but I wanted to commend to your attention a really wonderful hymn. I've mentioned it a time or two in the past, and I referred to it Friday night, but I could not remember all of the words, so I looked it up because it is well worth thinking about and paying attention to. This is a hymn that was written back in 1894.

The man who wrote the words, his name is Johnson Oatman, Jr., and I even have a picture of him here. The music was written by John R. Sweeney, and you can see these gentlemen there just for your amazement. But this was back just close to the turn of the last century.

The name of the hymn is Holy, Holy is What the Angels Sing. And there's a verse over in Revelation chapter 5 and verse 11, where John says, I heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and 10,000 times 10,000. We know that there are angels in heaven who constantly sing, Holy, Holy, Holy before the throne of the Father.

And with that idea in mind, Johnson Oatman wrote these words, and John Sweeney put the music to it. There is singing up in heaven such as we have never known, where the angels sing the praises of the Lamb upon the throne. Their sweet harps are ever tuneful, and their voices always clear.

Oh, that we might be more like them while we serve the Master here. But I hear another anthem, blending voices clear and strong. Unto him who hath redeemed us and hath bought us is the song.

We have come through tribulation to this land so fair and bright. In the fountain freely flowing, he hath made our garments white. Then the angels stand and listen, for they cannot join the song.

Like the sound of many waters by that happy, blood-washed throng. For they sing about great trials, battles fought, and victories won, and their praise, their great Redeemer, who hath said to them, well done. So although I'm not an angel, yet I know that over there I will join a blessed chorus that the angels cannot share.

I will sing about my Savior, who upon dark calvary freely pardoned my transgressions, died to set a sinner free. And the refrain, which of course you sing between each of those verses, is holy, holy is what the angels sing. And I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring.

But when I sing redemption story, they will fold their wings. For angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings. So if you want to look that up in a hymnal again, the name of it is holy, holy is what the angels sing.

Well, let's turn now to the Word of God where we resume our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 4. As we have come to understand over the course of the last three chapters, one of the reasons this book is so hard to understand is that it is so misunderstood. I think it has been misunderstood by the translators. I think in their effort to grapple with the Hebrew, which is always a challenge, any book of the Old Testament that you go to translate, Hebrew is not anything like English.

It is not anything like German. It is not anything like French. No matter what the native language of the scholar who approaches an Old Testament passage to translate it, even if he is an Israeli, even if he is a born-again or not born-again Jew, even modern Hebrew is not the same as Old Testament Hebrew.

It is the equivalent of speaking English and then going back and working with Beowulf or Shakespeare. You have got a great change from the ancient to the modern language. It is particularly difficult when you come to Ecclesiastes with the assumptions that have been made.

People go in believing that it is late, that it is full of Aramaisms and so forth. I have discovered, as we have gotten into the meat of the book, that it is sort of a circular argument because you go to the book and if you are not real sure what Solomon is talking about, you find these words and just

as in English, there are words that are susceptible of more than one meaning. They are homonyms in the sense that they are spelled the same, but there are two different roots behind them, two different loci of meaning, two different groups of meaning.

And so people tend to say, well, this seems to make more sense to me using the late meaning, and so I am going to use that. But boy, look at all of these late words. This must be a late book.

And yet there are older meanings for that same. You remember in Hebrew the words are all based on three letters, a verb or a noun. It is just three what they call radicals, three letters.

So you might have for the word to see, you have resh, aleph, and he, which is R, and a guttural, which is sort of the A, the first letter of the alphabet, and then H. And all of the other forms of that word and the nouns that come up and everything else all come from those three letters. Well, you have got 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, so there is going to be a limited number of combinations. Pretty soon you are going to run out of three-letter combinations so you can do the math and figure out what is it, three to the third power or something, or 22 to the third power, some calculation like that.

But pretty soon you are going to start duplicating and you are going to have two different meanings that are going to be represented by the same three letters. And so I have just been bemused several times when I go to the lexicon and it says, well, here is the early meaning of a word and it means one thing, and then here is a late meaning that was found later in Aramaic and so forth. And the only biblical use that you find for this Aramaic meaning is in Ecclesiastes.

And I think, well, it is almost as though you have invented a meaning for the word by looking at Aramaic and saying, well, in Aramaic, 600, 700, 800 years after Solomon, well, they used these three letters to mean this. And I can shoehorn that into Ecclesiastes and make a kind of sense out of the passage. And so that is what he was using.

And there is a perfectly good Hebrew word that was in use in Solomon's day that you find in the Psalms and you find in the Proverbs. But if you put that meaning into the passage, then the guy is scratching his head saying, well, this doesn't make any sense, so that must not be it. And it is kind of a circular argument.

You say, well, I am not going to use the old Hebrew meaning because I can't make sense of it, but Aramaic has a meaning that I can make sense of, so I am going to put it in there. And now I am going to say, well, this book had to be written late because Aramaic wasn't in use in Solomon's day. You see what I mean? It is just kind of a self-inflicted mistake.

Anyway, I won't go into all the gory details of that, but I saw that again in the passage we are going to be looking at this morning. And I will give you this as an example. But let's take a look.

Let's kind of refresh our minds. We have been away for two weeks from the passage. So let's go

back and read the last portion of Chapter 3 and the first portion of Chapter 4. We can pick up here in Chapter 3 in verse 12.

And you can follow along in your New King James there, but I am going to give you my, you know, Colonel Thieme used to always say, the corrected translation. And it makes it sound like, well, everybody else is wrong and mine is right. I don't mean to imply that so much, but I am going to give you what I consider to be a superior translation to what you might have before you.

Starting in verse 12. I know that there is nothing good in them, because if he, a man, were to rejoice or do good in his life, and every man who eats and drinks and sees good in all his labor, it is a thing given by God. And if we started out on a little bit of a confusing note, this is one of our main verses for today, and we are going to be seeing it two more times.

So despair not. We will come back and revisit what this all means. Verse 14.

I know that everything that God will do, it will be to eternity. There is nothing to add to it. There is nothing to diminish from it.

For God has done that which they will fear from before His face. What is, it has already been, and that which will be already is. But God will intensively seek out what is pursued.

This section, of course, is a reference to the difference between time and eternity. The thing that Solomon brought to Israel some 400 years after the birth of the nation, remember 1400 B.C., you had the Exodus, Moses delivers the first five books of the written Bible to Israel. Before that, it was all pretty much confined to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They had, I think, some written records that had not sort of risen to the level of inspiration. They had the traditions and the recollections of what had taken place, going all the way back to the time before the flood. And these records were on cuneiform tablets.

That was the writing of the day, these clay tablets. And at the time that Joseph and Jacob later came down to Egypt and brought with him these treasured records going all the way back to the dawn of time, Joseph, I think, deposited those records in the library at Egypt where they lay probably undisturbed for several hundred years. Joseph and the Israelites, the new Pharaoh who knew not Joseph, and the Israelites fell into disfavor and eventually were enslaved.

And these records just sat in the library, collecting dust, biding their time, so to speak. They have found these ancient libraries in other places, like at Nineveh and the Nag Hammadi Library down in Egypt, which had papyrus records. But they found a couple of caches of these clay tablets that were a part of royal libraries.

And this has shed great light on the study of ancient languages. Well, there was the same kind of library down in Egypt. And when Moses came along, was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter, is raised as an Egyptian prince, where is he going to go to do his homeschooling, so to speak? He's

going to be in the library of Egypt.

And as he pours over the history of Egypt and the glories of Pharaohs gone by and the previous dynasties and so on, and he comes across these records left there by another Hebrew prince in Egypt hundreds of years before. And he finds them and he reads them and he says, this is in danger of being forgotten among the Israelites. And he writes it down.

And then you have the book of Genesis. And that is what has come down to us. And you can see the colophons.

When we did our study of Genesis, you remember that every time you find *eletoledot*, which means these are the generations of. Well, this is the kind of colophon or notation that was made at the bottom of cuneiform tablets. And when you look at the spacing of these are the generations of in the early parts of Genesis, it is just about what you could fit on a clay tablet writing it in cuneiform.

And Moses transcribed these ancient cuneiform tablets, which he knew how to read because he'd been trained in that. How many Jews, how many Israelites knew how to read cuneiform? Well, Moses did because he cut his teeth on that. He learned that as a child.

And so God preserved. You wonder, well, how did they know the lifespans and who did what to whom and the song of the guy with the two wives and all that? Did God dictate this to Moses and he went into sort of a glazed over trance and auto-dictation type of thing? No, he had the records right there. And so this was set down and brought forward to Israel.

And so they had this Old Testament. They had the five books of the law from the hand of Moses, which reached all the way back to Adam and brought him all the way up to date. And Moses recorded the events of the Exodus and the miraculous intervention and preservation by God.

And then as the nation was formed in 1400 B.C., for the next 400 years you had the period of the judges, you have, of course, the 40 years of wandering and the conquest of the land, the period of the judges, and then you have Saul and then David and now Solomon. And this gets you down to about 1000 B.C. If there's any two dates you want to remember in ancient Hebrew history, 1440 B.C. is the Exodus. 1400, therefore, would be going into the land, crossing the Jordan 40 years later.

And then right around 1000 B.C. is when you have Solomon. And David is just before him. And they each, I think, ruled for 40 years.

So you have a couple of fixed points. Well, here's Solomon writing Ecclesiastes some 400 years after. And your books of Samuel are probably in existence but probably not widely circulated yet.

The Chronicles and so forth are still being written. You have the early parts of the history of

David's reign and Solomon's reign. But most of the Old Testament is not yet in existence.

So what do you have in that early revelation from God? Most of the communication of the Word of God in Israel is still done by audiovisual aids, just like you teach children. You have child evangelism or you have Bible class for kids. And what do you do? You get out the flannel board and you stick figures up there and you give them pictures to help them understand the Word of God that you're teaching, something that will help it stick in their mind.

Well, God gave this great storyboard in the Levitical offerings with the slaying of the animals and the wave offerings and the showbread and all of the different things that are a part of tabernacle worship and later temple worship. These were the audiovisual aids in the same way that water baptism was an audiovisual aid in the early days of the church. Audio in the sense that you say in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and visual in the sense that they're dunking down below the water and coming back up.

All of this was a great opportunity to communicate. Well, in the law and in the Levitical offerings, all of this teaching, what do you have? You have a strong picture of the need for redemption. You have the two sides of that coin of sin on the one side and the need for payment and justification on the other.

We are sinful. We are fallen. We are corrupt.

We need to be redeemed. We need to be cleansed. We need to be restored to relationship with God.

We need to be entered into relationship with God and then restored as we continue to live before Him. So that's all pictured. In the moral code and the civil code and the law, you have this is how you should live in this life.

This is what it means to live as someone who is a child of God. Solomon reviews all of this as he looks back and he studies. He can see the temple out his palace window.

He can see the law of Moses being enacted over and over again. He's got access to those scrolls. But with the wisdom that God gave him, he's thinking, you know, this is all about life under the sun.

This is what you do when you get up in the morning. You make sure that you're fair to your fellow Israelites, that you're fair to your slaves, that you follow the moral code and the religious code as far as not being defiled. And when you are defiled, being cleansed, and all of these things that are all about daily life.

Well, this is exactly the kind of life that we have before us. We have all the details of daily life. I was listening to a good friend of mine teach last week.

And he, like most of us, really enjoys the study of the Word of God. And he said, wouldn't it be great if we could just have Bible class every day? And, of course, he's got a place where they meet and so forth. And we would just be down here, he said, every day.

We would just have Bible class every day. And I understand that enthusiasm because I think it would be great. But he and I suffer from the stuff that goes with a teaching gift where your happiest place is when you're just immersed in a text and you're figuring it out and you're piecing it together and doing the translation and the interpretation and so forth.

And I've often wondered about the balance between studying the Word of God, thinking about the Word of God, prayer and all of the things that are overt aspects of our Christianity and the inevitable necessities of life. You just can't spend all day studying the Word of God. There are people who have tried this.

They take their Bible to work and open it and take work time studying the Bible and evangelizing their fellow workers. And we say, you know, that's not supposed to do. Well, where is the line? How much is enough? And it makes you realize that God has left us in this life and has given us all kinds of things that we must do.

We must sustain ourselves. We must earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. We must raise our kids.

We must keep our house. We must drive our cars and keep them maintained. We've got all of this other stuff.

And it's just necessary. You can't live, you know, it says man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Well, the reverse is also true.

You cannot just live sitting there reading and studying your Bible and never doing anything. And so somewhere a line has to be drawn. Well, you think about Solomon in Israel.

And he says, you know, we've got the law of Moses. We've got the rituals. We understand about redemption and the blood sacrifice.

And we're sinful and we need cleansing. We're defiled and we need cleansing. We have a responsibility to not live like the Gentiles, not live like the pagans.

Okay. But we're all wrapped up in the details of our earthly life. Even the law communicates in terms of daily life.

Righteousness is defined in terms of what you do or don't do to your neighbor, what you do or don't do in connection with God. You've got the vertical and the horizontal, but it's all defined in terms of actions. There's very little said in the law about mental attitudes, sins.

There's very little said in the law about sins of the tongue. There is some. Do not bear false witness.

You shall love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. There's attitudes and there's sins of the tongue. But most of it is over behavior because it's an audiovisual.

This is what you, when you're talking to little kids, you don't talk about all the deep thoughts and intents of the heart. You say you've got to obey. Obey your parents.

This is what the Bible tells little kids. Obey your parents and the Lord for this is right. It's about obedience.

It's about what you do action-wise. That's what these commands address themselves to. But as you mature, you begin to realize, even in earthly life, that it's not always just what you do but why you do it and how you do it and in what spirit you do it that really counts.

You can have grudging compliance. You can have bitter obedience where you obey but it is with a surly look and a muttering tongue. And the marks have been hit.

The behavior was accomplished. But as we mature in the human realm, we realize that a lot more needs to be said about what's going on in the soul. This is where Solomon is.

If you look at the national life of Israel, this is where if you look at the nation and look at the revelation from God, now God's revelation is going to start addressing itself to attitude and to motivation and to what is beyond this life. There's something more to life than just what's under the sun. What's under the sun are these overt things.

Paul says, When I was a child, I thought as a child. I spoke as a child. But when I matured, I put away childish things.

Well, in the progressive revelation of God's plan and purpose to Israel, Solomon is at the puberty stage. This is where the Israelites need to begin to grow up and think about something besides what they can see, what is illuminated by the sun as it rises and traverses the sky and sets. So it's a very important book not only for them but also for us because as we mature in the faith, we also move from simplistic views of righteousness and of obedience and of expressions of love for God and expressions of love for one another to recognize that there is something beyond this life.

How common is it as you look around both within and without to see the measure of whether something was good or not being how it turns out for us? Well, I know that if I am faithful and do what I'm supposed to do, God will bless me. I will have a blessed life. Things will turn out better.

My circumstances because God won't have to spank me. If I do the wrong thing, God is going to spank me and my life is not going to turn out so well. I'm not going to have the happiness and prosperity that I'm really looking for.

Well, this is sort of a childlike approach to life, isn't it? I want to do well because I don't want bad consequences. And we have sort of a childlike desire to please God. We want Him to be pleased.

We don't want to disappoint Him. But really the driving force when we're in our immature days is I don't want to get hammered. I don't want to get spanked.

Nobody does. And we understand that. And it's fine.

That's fine for a new and growing believer who's getting the sincere milk of the Word. But we're supposed to grow up, Ephesians chapter 4. We're supposed to mature. We're supposed to move beyond that stage and not spend our whole life as so many of us in the church today do just stalling out in the second grade or the third grade and never advancing beyond.

Well, I say all of that to say this. One of the ways that you can tell that you are passing that mark, you know, there are physical signs when you move from childhood to adulthood. You can see a difference physically.

And you can also see a difference in approach to life. You can watch your children. And as they start getting into early signs of moving into adulthood, they start to think differently.

And what is the nature of that change? They begin to think outside the box that circumscribes them. And rather than, you know, they'll start to pick up the dishes and take them to the sink or they'll pick up, they'll pitch in and help when something is going on, just unloading the car after a trip. You know, up through a certain age, little kids, you get home and, hell boy, they just rush out and go in and they want to find their pets and they want to see if their room is still there and all that.

And mom and dad are hauling in all the gear from the car. But it's interesting that at a certain age, all of a sudden, the child will look over their shoulder and say, oh, you know, all this stuff needs to come in. And they grab something and start bringing it in.

They start helping. And they start, you know, there's a period where you usually have to ask them and say, hey, you need to help us. But there's a place where they start to be conscious of that and do it on their own.

And it is a selflessness, it is a looking beyond the immediate that is one of the signs that maturity is beginning to happen. Well, here is one of the signs for us as believers that maturity is starting to happen. It is looking beyond this life.

It's looking beyond immediate consequences, looking beyond what will the benefit be in my circumstances if I obey, if I pray. We tend to pray and look for divine guidance because we want to be sure a decision is good. Should I buy this car or not? Should I buy this house or not? Should I do this or do that? Should I, you know, we have all of these different options.

And we, in our spiritual youth, look at that in terms of I want this to turn out well. And our first thought is not how is God going to do this decision? What will be the eternal implications of this decision? Is the glory of God going to reflect off of this decision in the ages to come? We think, I just want this to turn out well. I just don't want to create a disaster and bring it down on my own head.

I don't want to, you know, overcommit and be financially strapped and have hardship and woe. And that's natural and there's nothing wrong with it. In the same way that a child with a dirty diaper, there's nothing wrong with that when you're a child.

The problem is if you've gotten into your teenage years and you're still wearing and dirtying diapers, you're a case of arrested development. Something is wrong. And as we grow as believers, we should be growing into the place where we begin to look beyond this life.

That's what Ecclesiastes is in the national life and in the progress of revelation for Israel. Solomon is, along with his father David, and you can see this in the Psalms in a poetic fashion, but Solomon in prose and in argument is saying, you know, there's more to life than what's under the sun. And he looks at it from a philosophical point of view.

He says, I've looked at this. I've considered. I did everything you can do under the sun.

I did the biggest works, planted the greatest gardens, put together the greatest orchestras and singers. I've done all of these things. And I began to realize this is really just spinning wheels because it's Hebel.

It's just confined to this life. And Solomon himself, with the wisdom that God gave him at his own request, with the wisdom that he gained from his father David, with the Word of God circulating and percolating in his soul, reaches that point of maturity where he says, there's really more to life than life. There's more to life than earthly goals and earthly accomplishments because this is going to vanish at the point of my death.

And he begins to think past the point of his death, past the setting of the sun. That's what this whole book is about. And understanding that makes it a lot easier when we go and have to make interpretive choices and translational choices to understand what's really going on.

Well, there are some markers of this approach and of this viewpoint that we see in the book. And again, we started back here in verse 12, and Solomon says of chapter 3, I know that there is nothing good for a man simply rejoicing and doing good in his lifetime. Well, what kind of good are you talking about? It's a good thing to rejoice.

You know, Mel Brooks in one of his movies, he says, well, it's good to be the king. There's lots of benefits to being the king. And it's good in one sense.

Of course, a lot of the things that he considers to be good are really pretty, you know, frown-

inducing. But he thinks it's good and that there is a definition of good in that sense. But when Solomon says, I know that there's nothing good, ein tov.

It's E-Y-N space T-O-V or T-O-B. There's nothing good in rejoicing and doing good in one's lifetime. It reminds us of what Jesus said to the disciples about the Pharisees.

They stand on the street corners in their sackcloth and ashes, and they raise their hands to heaven in prayer, and they parade their righteousness before men. And He says, Truly I say to you, they have their reward. Whatever charge they're getting out of doing that, that's it.

There is no other reward beyond that. The little momentary pleasure that they think they're getting by parading themselves before men, that's it. Well, Solomon is saying essentially the same thing a thousand years earlier.

When you rejoice and do good, you know, the pleasure that you're getting out of it, that's it. It perishes with the using. Tomorrow you're going to have to do something else to feel good.

Rejoicing and doing good, it's really not good because it's heivil. It perishes with the using. And the same thing in verse 13.

Every man eating and drinking and seeing good in his labor, this is given by God. Everything God does remains forever. You see the contrast between 12 and 13 and 14? What man does, it's gratifying to him at the moment, but it vanishes.

What God does lasts for eternity. And Solomon is beginning to think, you know, there's more to life than life. There's eternity.

What do you do to get ready for eternity? What do you do to prepare for eternity? Everything God does remains forever. You don't add to it. You don't take from it.

God does this so that men will fear before His face. You've got to be before His face. You've got to be acknowledging God.

You've got to have God in view before this is going to make a difference. If you refuse to look at God, then you're just stuck cycling under the sun. That which has been already, that which has already been, God is going to intensively seek out what you pursue.

Our thoughts and intents, our goals and priorities, God is going to seek that out. That is going to be evaluated after the sun sets. And then he goes on to talk about that under the sun, in the place of justice, there's wickedness.

In the place of righteousness, there is wickedness. I said to myself in verse 17, God will judge both the righteous and the criminal. I myself said in my heart, the righteous and the criminal, God will judge because there is a time for every purpose and concerning every doing there.

God has ordained the times. Do you remember 3, 1 through 8? A time for this, a time for that, turn, turn. Well, God knows whether it's a time to reap or a time to sow.

God knows whether it's a time to tear up or a time to build up. And God is going to evaluate on that basis. That evaluation is after the sun sets.

Have we reached the point where when we come to a decision, when we come to an action that needs to be accomplished, we look past the setting of the sun and we say, you know, God has ordained the times. God has defined whether this is a time for me to separate or a time for me to stick with. Is it a time for me to persevere? Is it a time for me to keep banging on the door until the door opens? Or is it a time for me to recognize that this is a closed door that God has closed, and if I keep trying to bang it down, I'm like Balaam with the angel standing in the path.

Three different times he tries to go by. And if the ass had not stopped, he would have been cloven in two by the angel with the sword. How do we know when it's a time to persevere and bang on through an obstacle, and when it's a time to recognize that that obstacle has been put there by God to keep us from doing something we shouldn't do? There is a time.

There is a way to know. And the measure of what's right and what's wrong is not just how will this turn out in time. What is going to be the effect? What is going to be the evaluation? God is going to intensively seek out what we were pursuing.

Were we pursuing circumstantial benefit, or were we pursuing eternal benefit? Solomon, it's amazing. Solomon is talking about this in the Old Testament age when outside his window, priests are slaughtering calves and bulls, and people are walking around figuring out, well, should I brush this dust off my robe two times or three times? How far can I walk on the Sabbath? And this is a big step forward in the revelation of wisdom to Israel. Those who have an ear to hear and an eye to see are going to seize on this and begin to build an eternal weight of glory for themselves.

And it's an amazing thing. Solomon says, you know, if you just look at life from an earthly perspective, what befalls the sons of men and what befalls the animal is the same. You live, you strut and fret your hour on the stage, and you die.

Who knows the spirit or breath of the sons of men whose ascent is upward, and the spirit or breath of the animals whose descent is downward to the earth, he says in verse 21. Verse 20 says, all are going to one place, Halak, to walk or to go. They're all, you know, Jesus talked about the wide road and the broad gate that leads to destruction and the narrow road and the straight gate that leads to life.

And life is often pictured in the Bible as a crowd of people walking along. Well, pretty soon there's a place where you drop off the road, and there's other people getting on the road. They're born, they're walking along the road, and then they go to their destination.

Well, Solomon says in verse 20, all are walking to one place. All are from the dust and all go to the dust. This is when you look at life under the sun, and if you really stop and think about it, what's the point of knocking yourself out? Why not just eat and drink and be merry? For tomorrow we die.

Who knows about this ascent upward for the spirit or the breath of man? Well, if you're thinking about that, you've already transcended what's under the sun. Now you've reached that point where you're starting to look beyond the immediate and the visible. Solomon says in verse 22, I have seen that there is nothing good from which man will rejoice from his doings, because this itself is his portion.

You have your reward. You went out and you waxed your car. You stand back and look at it, and it's gratifying.

You refinish a piece of furniture. You paint a picture. You clean the kitchen.

You do six loads of laundry. You get it all done and folded and put away. You say, ah, great.

But that doesn't last. It doesn't sustain. It's great while it lasts, but it's heavile.

It just doesn't... You look at Donald Trump and guys of that ilk, Hunt and all these other billionaires, Howard Hughes. The guy wound up miserable with his fingernails growing two feet long, sequestered away, wearing masks and afraid of germs after all that he accomplished in the empire that he built. It didn't sustain.

It didn't last. It was all under the sun. It's all heavile.

So it's not good that a man just rejoices from his doings, because that's his whole portion. That's his entire reward. It's like Jesus talking about the Pharisees.

You have your reward and that's it. Well, that doesn't last. Who will bring him to see what comes after him? That's the question.

There's more to life than life. Who's going to bring you to see what comes after? Well, that gets us up to chapter 4. Chapter 4 is where we picked up last time. And if we want to get beyond the setting of the sun, we have to recast our view of what we see under the sun and look at it in an eternal perspective.

God has put eternity in our hearts, Solomon told us back in chapter 3. And this is what should give us a sense of dissatisfaction at just looking around. A dog is just happy from day to day. Cats, if you can figure them out, seem to be happy over certain things.

You've got a parakeet swinging in the cage or you've got a fish swimming in the bowl. They don't know from today or tomorrow or the next day. They get their favorite food in the dish and they're

happy.

But do you just want to be like the animals? Do you want to have the same instant gratification and the same need to be re-gratified the next day and the next and the next? Does a dog really remember two weeks ago when he got his favorite food? He's concerned with the immediate. He's living in the moment. That's what animals do.

Well, Solomon says there's something beyond. There's something after. And that's what God is going to be evaluating.

So now let's go back and look at what's going on under the sun. Remember he said, I looked in the place of righteousness and I see crime. I see things that shouldn't be under the sun.

Well, he's going to return to that in chapter 4. I looked at the acts of oppression which are being done under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed and there's no one to comfort them. On the side of the oppressors is power but there's no one to comfort.

And then he says in verse 2, So I saw, I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. Because better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun. Well, now how does this fit into the argument that Solomon has constructed thus far? Well, this is where we're going to have to pick up when we come back from our break.

Is it really true that you're better off to never exist? You know, Job said this in the depths of his suffering. I wish I'd never been born. I wish I'd never come to light that I'd expired in my mother's womb.

So is Solomon really congratulating the dead and the non-existent more than the ones who come to life and see the injustice and unrighteousness in the world? Well, you'll have to come back and find out after the break.