

01-07-22a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Jeremiah chapter 20. Jeremiah chapter 20. Sometimes things can happen in the course of one's daily life that are so discouraging you just want to throw up your hands and quit.

Thankfully that is usually a temporary and passing idea, but it is legitimate in some cases. There are other cases where people ought to know better. But there is, just like there is a sin unto death, there is a weariness of life, there is a disgust with circumstances unto death.

And you know, somebody that has been living by themselves for a couple of weeks because their wife went to Arkansas or something might be living on frozen food and after a couple of weeks of TV dinners you might say, you know what, I am just sick to death of frozen dinners. Or we say, I'm just sick to death of this, that, and the other. And that is a form of hyperbole.

We don't always literally mean I would rather die than eat another frozen dinner. But it's a way of expressing intense feeling. So there are these two things.

There is a hyperbole that says I am sick to death of this, that, or the other. And there is the actual weariness unto death. You think about Jonah under the broom tree there where the plant, the gourd, grew up in a day and then when it withered away he was just so disgusted that God had not destroyed Nineveh and that his credibility as a prophet was in his mind all shot down.

He wanted to see the pagans roasted with brimstone and he said, oh Lord, just let me die. Well, how real is that? There's lots of people that say they want to die that say, oh, you know, there was a TV show called Just Shoot Me. But yet, thankfully, not very many people actually go all the way to the point of just saying I really am going to end my life.

Well, this is the idea that is in view in the passage under our gaze this morning in Ecclesiastes. Jeremiah reaches a similar point which we're going to look at here in chapter 20 by way of illustration and analogy. There's a lot you could say about the career of Jeremiah.

We'll just pick him up here right in the middle of his ministrations to the southern kingdom of Judah not long before they go out in exile to Babylon. And he has been straining himself trying to warn and exhort and encourage the people to return to God because God keeps telling him these people are a stench in my nose and I'm going to boot them out of the promised land. I'm going to boot them out of Jerusalem.

I'm going to cause them to reap the fruit of their apathy and indifference and disobedience and so forth. Well, we have a character named Pasher, the son of Emmer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord. This, by the way, is Jeremiah chapter 20 verse 1. Pasher, the son of Emmer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, prophet of doom, sandwich board walking up and down in front of the

temple there, condemning the leadership, condemning the lifestyles, condemning the policies and the trends of culture and everything else.

Jeremiah prophesied these things. Pasher heard it and he didn't like it. Now, remember, he is the priest and he is also the chief governor in the house of the Lord.

He is the head man. He's the big cheese. So Pasher struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin.

When it says he struck him, this means he had him beaten. Put him in the stocks in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. So instead of Jeremiah being able to prophesy in and around the house of the Lord, now he is humiliated in the stocks.

When we visited the early settlements around Massachusetts, we saw the stocks that they had outside the early settlement there where they would humiliate people who had done wrong. So it happened on the next day. So he was there for a whole day.

And you know, it's not like these marathon dance contests and things or people who live. There's a lady I read about that has had herself locked up in a glass cage full of 2,000 scorpions. And she's staying in there to try to set some kind of a record.

She's already been stung twice. But she's a lady scorpion. She's got a tattoo and everything.

She's off in Indonesia or somewhere. But anyway, she gets 15 minute bathroom breaks. You know, they let her out of the cage for 15 minutes.

Same thing with dance, you know, dance all night contests, marathon dance. They do let you take like a five minute break every hour or something. Well, when you're in the stocks, you don't get a bathroom break.

It's one of the parts of the humiliation of that is that there is literally nowhere to go when you're in the stocks. So Jeremiah is there for 24 hours. This is a terrible thing.

So the next day, Pasher brought Jeremiah out of the stocks. And Jeremiah said to him, the Lord has not called, or literally will no longer call your name Pasher, but Magor Misaviv, it says here, which in Hebrew means terror on every side. For thus says the Lord, behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends.

And they shall fall by the sword of their enemies. And your eyes will see it. I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword.

Moreover, I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things, all the treasures of the kings of Judah. I will give into the hand of their enemies who will plunder them,

seize them, and carry them to Babylon. And you, Pasher, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity.

You shall go to Babylon, and there you shall die and be buried there. You and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies." Well, of course, there wasn't much worse for an Israelite than to die and be buried outside the land rather than being gathered to your fathers. But then here is a prayer that Jeremiah prays, O Lord, you induced me, and I was persuaded.

You are stronger than I and have prevailed. I am in derision daily. This is, again, you remember in our Luke study, we talked about the witness side of the equation when the apostles are supposed to go before kings and princes and prophesy, and he says, you know, don't worry about what you're going to say in that hour.

The Holy Spirit will give you what you should say. And if you confess me before man, I will confess you before my Father. If you deny me before man, you fail to show forth Christ as the principal, then Christ is going to not show you forth.

He's not going to bring you out as a treasure before the angels and before the Father. And that's the witness side. And then he turns to the witness side, the one who receives the testimony, and he says, if these people, when you testify and talk about the Son of Man, if they reject your word, it will be forgiven them.

If they speak a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven. But if they blaspheme the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven because this is the inner witness of God Himself, and that is the final answer. That is the ultimate question and the final answer.

If God the Holy Spirit tells you about Christ, tells you about the Father and the necessity for cleansing and forgiveness and relationship with God, and you reject that, that is unforgivable sin. Well, so you have the two sides. Jesus addresses what the witness should do and say and think, and then here's what the person who hears the witness, both of human beings and of the Holy Spirit, what the consequences are of their response or reaction.

Well, here we have sort of the same thing in Jeremiah 20. First of all, you get the message that goes to Pasher, but now you get the heart of Jeremiah. It's not easy being a prophet.

You know, we tend to look and see the prophets, and they're in the stocks, and they get persecuted and sawed in half and chased around, and we think, well, they were a prophet. They were strengthened by the Lord. They just marched mightily onward, you know, to the beat of a different drummer.

But it was just as hard being a prophet as it is for us to function in our circumstance. So here's the heart of Jeremiah. He says, Lord, you compelled me.

You induced me, and I was persuaded. I responded when the call came and the mission and the

challenge was issued. You are stronger than I and have prevailed.

I am in derision daily. Everyone mocks me. When I spoke, I cried out.

I shouted violence and plunder. This is the message to the southern kingdom, isn't it? The Babylonians are coming, because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily, because he identifies himself with the word and that prophecy. He is derided.

He is reproached. He is abused every day. So he says, well, maybe I can relieve this bad set of circumstances.

I said, I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name. It's just not worth it. Nobody's listening anyway.

It's not producing a response. Why should I keep on being a prophet and put up with all this abuse? It's a dead end. But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones.

I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. This is the verse I think of when people say, well, how did you know that you needed to go to seminary and that you had the gift of a pastor or a teacher and that this is what you had to do? Well, this is what it's like. If you have a communication gift, if you try to hold it in, it's like a fire in your bones.

It's like that song, I've got the music in me and it's got to come out. Well, that's what Jeremiah says here. His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones.

I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. When we talked last time about integrity, when we talked about the transformation that takes place inside our soul, this was in our Luke study about hypocrisy, that the root of the problem is not being a hypocrite, doing something different on the outside than you do on the inside. The real root of the problem is you have to be a hypocrite because the inside is rotten.

So you let the power of God get in and cleanse and change and transform, and then you function with integrity. What's on the inside comes out. And in fact, if the word of God, which is living and powerful, is in your soul, it has to come out.

And you are going to live a life of character and integrity because you can do nothing else. It changes your nature. You become the new man that is potential at the point of salvation.

So here's Jeremiah. He is a prophet by design, by calling. And the word of God that is in his heart, it burns like a fire.

It's in his bones, and he just can't hold it back. For I heard many mocking, fear on every side. Report, they say, and we will report it.

Tell us as soon as you see a Babylonian coming over the hill, and we'll spread the alarm. But you, Jeremiah, you've been preaching this message of woe and doom for weeks and months and even years, and we haven't seen any Babylonians coming over the hill. You're a scare monger.

You're a fear monger. Fear on every side. They mock him.

Report, and we will report it. Even his near acquaintances watch, Jeremiah says, for my stumbling, saying, perhaps he can be induced. Then we will prevail against him, and we will take our revenge on him.

And people will do this, even in your own family, even among your friends and acquaintances, where you're trying to live your Christian life, and people tsk-tsk, and they shake their head, and they're watching for an opportunity to vindicate what they told you all along. Oh, you think you know your spouse, but you just wait until a certain amount of time passes, and you'll see they're all rotten. There aren't any good men, or there aren't any good women, or whatever it is they say.

We will prevail. We will take our revenge. This is in the sense of vindication.

His acquaintances are going to say, Jeremiah, we told you. Look, you've been in the stocks all day. You know, quiet this stuff down.

You get these wild ideas, and think you have to go talk about the Babylonians all the time. Give it a rest. Just, why don't you teach the positive sides of the Word of God? Encourage people in the law.

Give them the milk and honey side. Don't be giving them the fire and brimstone all the time. You've got to quieten down a little bit.

Quit doing all the rebuke and correct business. We will prevail. We will take our revenge.

Look at what he says in verse 11. The Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome one. Therefore, my persecutors will stumble and will not prevail.

They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten. And we've been talking about the lasting nature of the consequences of what we choose to do in this life.

And people who rebuke the prophet, who are waiting to trip up the communicator of the Word of God, and that's all of us. All of us are salt and light. All of us are a witness and a testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Word of God.

And people who take issue, even other believers who think you're doing it wrong, that you ought to be in a bigger church, or you ought to be more active, or you ought to be doing this, that, and the other. And you are following the challenge and the guidance of the Word of God and the

ministry of the Spirit in your own soul. These people are going to stumble and not prevail.

They're not going to prosper. And their discipline, the consequences of their actions, will never be forgotten. It will be everlasting.

And that means that there are going to be many people in the darkness which is outside when the kingdom comes. Some of them will even be outside the gates of the New Jerusalem, because they loved and practiced a lie, just like old Pasher does here. Look at verse 12.

But O Lord of hosts, you who test the righteous and see the mind and heart, let me see your vengeance on them, for I have pleaded my cause before you. Jeremiah wants vindication. You often don't see it in this life, but Jeremiah, this is basically a reminder that Jeremiah knows and believes in the resurrection.

He says they are going to have an everlasting confusion that will never be forgotten. And he says, I want to see it. Raise me up and balance the scales.

Execute justice, vindicate your servant, vindicate your word and the communicator of it, for I have pleaded my cause before you. Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, verse 13, for He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers. Now this is on Jeremiah's good days.

This is when he's digging himself out of the pit, he's depressed, he's discouraged, he's going to the Lord saying, Lord, I get abused and mocked every time I communicate your word. And he comforts himself inside. Well, now we get kind of another run through this same idea.

Cursed be the day in which I was born. Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me. Let the man be cursed who brought news to my father saying, a male child has been born to you, making him very glad.

And let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew and did not relent. Let him hear the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon because he did not kill me from the womb so that my mother might have been my grave and her womb always enlarged with me. Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow that my days should be consumed with shame? Doesn't this often happen to us? You know, we have waves of good and bad mental attitude.

We hit a crisis, we hit a challenge, we hit the resistance and the opposition of the world and the people in it. And at first we're discouraged, then we remember, well, we're a believer, man is born to suffer, God works all things together for good. We go to God in prayer and we sort of dig ourselves out of the pit only to turn around and fall right back in it again.

And it seems like we can't sustain our divine viewpoint of life. And we have to keep going back and renewing our higher perspective because we comfort ourselves, we think we've got ourselves balanced and squared away. And then another facet of our circumstances manifests itself and we go right back into the pit of discouragement.

And you sort of, Jeremiah, they call him the weeping prophet, but when you read his books, Jeremiah and Lamentations, you realize that even for an Old Testament book or books, this is where you really get into the soul and into the mental attitude struggles that go on for believers even in the Old Testament age, perhaps especially in the Old Testament age. But let me ask you, we introduced the idea at the outset that there is a genuine desire for death and then there is a hyperbolic, an exaggerated idea where we say, I am sick to death, oh, I wish I was dead, you know, I'm so humiliated, I just wish I was dead. Well, people can say that, teenagers say it all the time.

They go to school and find out that they didn't dress right or committed some faux pas and they say, oh, everybody saw me, I was so humiliated, the teacher called on me and I wasn't ready, I just wish I was dead. Well, you say, okay, here's the gun, here's the bullets, step outside so you don't make a mess in here. Well, people generally wouldn't go that far.

It's hyperbole, it is an expression of supreme dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction. What do you think, which category do you think verses 14 through 18 are and is there a clue as to which it is? Is this hyperbole or is this an actual wish to have never been born? Well, the clue is verse 15 and 16, the man who brought the news to Jeremiah's father that his son is born, Jeremiah says, let that man be cursed, let him be like the cities that the Lord laid waste and desolated, let him hear the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon, just rack and ruin his entire life. Well, who's this guy? He's just some hapless servant someplace that ran out of the tent, the midwife poked her head out and told Benaiah the servant and said, hey, Benaiah, go tell, you know, Jeremiah's father here that he's born.

His wife has just had a son. And so some little nameless, faceless servant ran over and told the father, because they didn't come into the delivery room in those days, said, ah, a son is born. And this, you know, the son was always good news in Israel.

They were very male oriented. And so this was glad tidings. And Jeremiah says, a curse and a pox on the guy that told my father that I was born.

Well, obviously this guy has no responsibility. He didn't have anything to do with the conception of the birth or anything else. We don't know who he was or what station he occupied.

He's symbolic. Jeremiah is reaching and saying, I can't tell you how disgusted I am, how much I wish that I wasn't in the position I'm in. I just, you ever been in a situation like that? I have.

I've been in, in where I would do just about anything to get out. It happened. I, of course, you know, plead the urge probably, you know, a couple of times a week.

But I've been, I've been at social gatherings. I've been in conversations where I thought, you know, even though this person outranks me in the organization or something, I have got to get

out of here. I've had people uh, start to engage me in some kind of gossip and I'm trapped in a car with them.

And just, you just want to crawl out of your own skin. You want to be someplace else. Well, and yet you can be in circumstances where there is no place else to go.

Yeah. You're just out of options. And you say, I just wish I was dead.

I'd rather be dead than, than be like this. Well, if somebody gave you the means, you wouldn't actually kill yourself, but that's how strongly you feel. It's a communication of strong feeling.

I wanted to show you this passage in particular, as we return now to Ecclesiastes chapter four, because we have a similar situation, similar use of death or of not being born, employed by Solomon when he starts to consider oppression under the sun. We'll start at chapter four, verse one and review just a bit. He says, I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun.

And look, the tears of the oppressed, they have no comforter on the side of their oppressors. There is power, but they have no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead more than the living who are still alive yet better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Well, the question we have as we look at this idea that's put forward by Solomon, is he literally saying it would be better to not be born than to come into the world and see the evil and oppression? There are people who make this argument, couples who get married and say, you know, we don't really want to have any kids. We don't want to bring a child into this world. The world's too crazy.

It's too unpredictable. It's what kind of a world is it? They used to say this back when the threat of nuclear annihilation was more evident than it is now. It is just as real as it ever was.

I don't know why people think. They say, oh, I don't have to worry about that. The Cold War is over.

And last time I looked, every single missile with a nuclear warhead that was pointed at the United States was still humming away in its silo over in the former Soviet Union. I haven't heard of the destruction of any of those. And their crummy technology and their second-rate engineering, to me, it's more likely now that one of those things is going to go off and come over here than it was when they were new.

Some of those things have been sitting in their silos 20 and 25 years. Well, you know, different people have access to the red button, but they're all still over there and they're building more. I completely don't understand everybody that says, oh, the Cold War is over, nothing to worry about.

Now you've got a bunch of little petty tin pot dictators with the button in their hand instead of one great big unified petty tin pot dictator. Well, so people would say, well, I don't, you know, how can you bring a child into this world? Look at the drugs and the sex and the violence and the disease. And it's just, it's no kind of a world to bring it.

Well, it's not any worse than it ever has been. We just have more media coverage and so forth. But this is the argument people give.

And so Solomon here says, I, and we looked at this word last time, it isn't so much praise the dead as I am impressed. I, this, I honor them. I stand back and say, you know, the dead are better off because they're not having to look at this stuff.

And somebody that never saw it to begin with, uh, it would be even better. And verse three needs a, it's the nuance here is not exactly right. It does say, uh, talk about one who in terms of existence, but it doesn't say one who has never existed, but one who has not yet existed.

The one who has yet to be born. Um, it doesn't mean it would be better never to exist. He just says the ones that haven't come into the world yet, the dead saw the oppression and saw the hardships in the world.

And then now they don't have to see it anymore. So they're better off than the ones that are still looking at it. But better than that is the one that has never seen it yet.

So this is not really an argument for no existence. What he's saying is the oppression is so, uh, discouraging that if you're not having to see it anymore, you're better off than somebody that's still looking at it. And if you've never seen it, you're better off yet.

This is not a commentary on whether it's better to be alive, dead, or never to have been born. It is a commentary on the level of corruption in the world and the lack of comfort under the sun because the oppressed are crying and they have no comforter. The oppressors have power, but they have no comforter.

It doesn't matter which side of the oppression scale you're on. You can be the oppressor or the oppressee, but neither one has a comforter. Just because you have power and you can go oppress people doesn't give you comfort.

There is no comforter for that. And if you're under the heel of the oppressor and have no comforter, well, really, he says, having the power and being able to oppress doesn't make you any better off ultimately because neither one has a comforter. So this crummy situation where there is oppression, he doesn't say everybody is either an oppressor or an oppressee.

He says in verse 1, I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun. And when there is oppression, there's no good side. It isn't any better to be the oppressor than to be

the oppressee because if you're an oppressor, you've got stuff wrong in your soul and there is no comfort.

You don't get any joy and peace and something that lasts out of being an oppressor. It is still heivil. You're better off if you don't have to look at it anymore and you'd be even better off if you haven't seen it yet.

Who has not seen evil work that is done under the sun. This, again, is under the glass dome of time and circumstance on the earth. So you can see that this idea is used often in scripture.

The idea of not having been born is a means of emphasizing your point. You might take a look at Numbers chapter 11 and verse 14. Moses used this same form of hyperbole.

Go back to Numbers chapter 11 and verse 10. Numbers 11.10. You remember after Moses got all the people out there in the wilderness? My father sent me an interesting set of statistics talking about the logistics necessary to sustain the Israelites out in the wilderness. Depending on how you estimate the numbers, this was talking about the amount of water it would take per day to sustain up to two million people out in the wilderness.

Just train loads and train loads of water and food and wood for cooking and 750 square miles just to make camp. How long it would take them to get across the Red Sea if two million people were going to cross in one night. The gap in the water would have to be three miles wide and they'd have to march 5,000 abreast for everybody to get across in one night.

It's a huge undertaking. I'm not sure. I'd have to go back and double check the numbers in some of that because they were talking about the food necessary to sustain all of these people would take two trains 1,800 miles long or some ridiculous thing.

But you think about the amount of manna for two million people. They figured two million based on the 600,000 men and you figure if they all had a spouse and had a family of two, one or two children average, you'd be up around two million people starting with 600,000 men. Anyway, Moses is responsible for this whole group.

So in verse 10 of Numbers 11, Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent, and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused. Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the Lord, why have you afflicted your servant? Why have I not found favor in your sight that you have laid the burden of all these people on me? And you may remember in some of our previous studies I've mentioned, you remember the passage that says now Moses was the most humble man that ever lived.

This is in the context of when Miriam is accusing him and she winds up turning leprous and all. She's making noises about his marriage to the Ethiopian. And it says Moses was the most humble man who ever lived.

The word translated humble there is better translated afflicted, those who are oppressed, those who are afflicted. That's what that word really means. Moses was the most afflicted man who ever lived.

He was the most oppressed man who ever lived. So this is a case of oppression, trying to care for say two million people and when they get to complaining and two million people are all upset with you. I mean, we get upset when one or two people are unhappy with us.

You know, the boss isn't satisfied, the spouse isn't satisfied, the parents aren't satisfied. Somebody's looking askance at us. It can ruin our whole day.

Somebody with whom we work or with whom we have dealings is looking askance at us, rightly or wrongly. We can get depressed. Well, think about two million people all pointing the finger and saying, you are the guy that got us into this.

Well, Moses, it says Moses was displeased. It's a whole lot stronger than that. Moses was deeply depressed and he goes to the Lord and he says, why have you afflicted me this way? I'm the most afflicted man that ever lived.

Why have I not found favor in your sight that you've laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I forget them that you should say to me, carry them in your bosom as a guardian carries a nursing child to the land which you swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? They weep all over me saying, give us meat that we may eat. I am not able to bear all these people alone because the burden is too heavy for me. If you treat me like this, please kill me here and now.

If I've found favor in your sight and do not let me see my own wretchedness. Well, do we really think that Moses was suicidal? If he really wanted to die, he'd just gone out and said, Aaron, hand me that sacrificial knife and he would have been gone. This is hyperbole.

He says, you know, I'm sick to death of all these people. And so the Lord says, Moses, I'm going to teach you how to delegate. I'm going to get you 70 guys, five or six from each tribe, and we'll get this straightened out.

They will bear the burden of the people with you. I will take of the spirit that is upon you, put it on them that you may not bear it yourself alone. So anyway, I think that's a great passage.

I take great comfort when I go back and realize that whatever our problems may be, they're nothing compared to Moses. Now take a look at first Kings chapter 19 and verse 4. Talk about prophets sitting under trees. First Kings 19, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done up there on Mount Carmel, how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.

So Jezebel sent a message to Elijah saying, so let the gods do to me and more also, if I do not

make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. Basically you got 24 hours to live and then you're going to be splattered all over the ground just like the prophets of Baal. So when Elijah saw that, he arose and ran for his life.

You know, talk about pegging the meter on the positive side and then pegging it on the negative side. Here's Elijah calling down fire from heaven, burning off the whole top of Mount Carmel, slaughtering the prophets of Baal, mighty man of God. One woman sends one messenger with one message and Elijah is a craven coward running for his life.

He's, what happened to all of the flesh of, you know, how that is. Be cautious after a victory. So he arose and ran for his life, went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. I think I said broom for Jonah, but it was a gourd for Jonah. It was the broom for Elijah.

And he prayed that he might die and said, it is enough. Now, Lord, take my life for I am no better than my father's. So as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, arise and eat.

So he looked and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water. So he ate and drank. People that want to die don't eat and drink.

You know, what's the point of eating and drinking? I mean, it's, I've always kind of wondered about the last meal tradition for the guy that's about to be executed. They say, well, we'll feed you whatever you want. Well, or the alcohol they rub on his arm before they give him the lethal injection.

I mean, you think, what's the point? Just do the execution and get it over with. But here, Elijah, even though he's depressed and says, take my life, when God gives him provision to sustain his life, he accepts it. He says, no, Lord, I don't want that bread and water.

I just want to die. He takes it. So we get a little bit beneath the surface of this plea for death.

He laid down again. The angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him and said, arise and eat because the journey is too great for you. The reason you are so depressed is you've got this burden that is greater than you can bear.

What we often forget is there are burdens that are too great to bear. It was too great a burden for Moses to bear the weight of two million people. It was too great for Elijah.

And God knew it. But a lot of times we have to come to the place where we know it and go to God and recognize that he is our burden bearer. I love that song by the statesman called, Oh My Lord, What a Time.

It's not just the statesman. Lots of gospel groups have sung it. But it talks about, it says five or six different things about the Lord.

And I always remember them in alphabetical order. I used to wonder how these quartets could sing so fast and remember the order of these phrases. And I finally figured out that at least when the statesman sang it, it's in alphabetical order.

It says, he's my burden bearer. He's my friend in trouble. He's my light in darkness.

He's my sword and shield. And those things are all descriptions of what the Lord does. But sometimes we have to come up against it.

I've had this happen with children sometimes where they say, oh, you know, I can carry that. And I say, well, let me just hand this to you and we'll see if you can carry it or not. You hand them this 75 or 80 pound thing and you keep a hold of it, but you let them feel as much of the weight until they realize that they're going to double over with it.

And then you say, now, you know, let me carry this. But sometimes they don't really understand why you're not letting them carry it until they feel the weight. And so God sometimes lets us feel the weight.

And when we say, Lord, this is too heavy. You're right. Then he provides the means to take some of it off of us.

So God tells him, the angel comes back the second time, touched him and said, arise and eat. The journey is too great for you. So he arose and ate and drank and he went in the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

This tells you something about the provision of God. When God provides you food and drink, that's some pretty good food there. Of course, the 40 days and 40 nights are highly significant.

But look at verse 9, there he went into a cave and he's been sustained. He hasn't had to eat for 40 days and 40 nights. This ought to be kind of a bell ringer in the mind.

But he spent the night in the cave and the word of the Lord came to him and he said to him, what are you doing here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts. The children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left and they seek to take my life.

Kind of reminds you of Jeremiah. So he said, go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord.

But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the

earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire, a still small voice. So it was when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly the voice came to him and said, what are you doing here, Elijah? He said, I've been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts.

The children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left and they seek to take my life. And the Lord said to him, go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.

And when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. And you will anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel. And Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel, Mahola, you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill. Whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.

So this gives the encouragement to Elijah that he needs. It is revelation of God's plan and purpose that comforts and strengthens and sustains. You'll notice that the wind and the earthquake and all of that, even the still small voice did not change Elijah's view of life.

He says the very same thing when God asks him what he's doing there that he said before the earthquake, before the wind. And we sometimes get the idea that we want to see God act. We want to see God work.

We want to see God shake the ground, make the wind blow, speak and have something take place and that this is what we need in terms of comfort and strength. What is it that comforts and strengthens Elijah? It's not the earthquake because God wasn't in the earthquake. It wasn't the wind because God wasn't in the wind.

It wasn't even the still small voice. And this poor little voice has been abused down through the centuries because people say, well, this is the Holy Spirit speaking. It doesn't say that at all.

It just says there was this quiet voice. The quiet voice is the one that asks the question, Elijah, what are you doing here? After the wind and after the earthquake. But the wind and the earthquake made no difference.

What did make a difference is what God was in, the plan and purpose of God, the communication of truth that is real to Elijah and he sees the unfolding of God's plan. God says I'm going to use an outside agency to discipline Israel. I'm going to use a king within Israel and I'm going to use a prophet in Israel.

And nobody is going to escape one of those three factors. That's what motivates Elijah to leave

the cave and go back and resume his ministry. I think also the idea that somebody is about to replace him as prophet is a little bit of motivation.

He says, whoa, you're going to anoint my successor? But this does give him the light at the end of the tunnel. There is going to be the passing of the baton. And so Elijah says, well, if I can just push through to the tape here, push through to the finish, get into my sprint, there's going to be relief.

So all of these things are designed to comfort. It's the communication of truth that comforts and strengthens and encourages. But he was ready to throw in the towel and quit.

So this is another use of that type of hyperbole. And of course, Job, we don't really need to turn there, but you will remember in Job chapter 3, verses 20 through 22, where Job says, you know, cursed was the day on which I was born. I wish I'd never seen the light of day that I had died in my mother's womb and so forth.

This is usually a temporary condition. When you get to the 40th chapter of Job and you go and see his children, he has seven new sons and three new daughters and he's twice as prosperous as he was before. You don't see Job saying, oh, curse be the day I was born.

This is an expression of deep depression, deep dissatisfaction with the status quo. It doesn't always mean that you literally wish you'd never been born. But you come to that point when you look at grief and woe.

When you get back now to Ecclesiastes chapter 4, look at what Solomon says as he resumes. Well, actually, I guess we ought to do that after the break. This is probably a good place to stop.

I can certainly tell it's time for me to take a break. But if there's one thing to remember out of this, it is not abnormal to be discouraged. It is not abnormal to be depressed, deeply depressed, deeply discouraged.

But follow the example of what you see in Scripture. What do these people do? Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, go to God, tell him this burden is too great for me to bear. That's probably exactly what he is waiting for because oftentimes we will reach that level of discouragement or that end of resources because we've been pulling out of our own bucket.

We've been trying to sustain and operate in our own strength. And God says, I'm going to give you something that's too heavy for you to bear so that you'll turn to me and ask me to lift it off and then I'll demonstrate my power. And it's a useful lesson because we all get discouraged and this is the proper response.

And it's very encouraging to see how these men went on to do great things and to have their names recorded for all eternity in God's Word. Let's pause here and take our break.