

01-07-29a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our Scripture reading to the Psalms. This will be Psalm 66. Psalm 66.

We will be continuing our study of Ecclesiastes. There are some ideas that are addressed both in our current section of Ecclesiastes and in Psalm 66. Just to make sure we make the connection, I'm going to review a little bit of our passage in Ecclesiastes.

You can keep yourself there at Psalm 66, but let me review and read just a little bit of our passage. I'm going to begin in Ecclesiastes 4, verse 7. Then you have in italics, but he never asks, which is a complete fabrication. It isn't in the Hebrew.

The question is, for whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? This also is hevel and a grave misfortune. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. For he comes out of prison to be king. This is the youth.

He comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom. I saw all the living who walk under the sun. They were with the second youth who stands in his place.

There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king. Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is Hevel and grasping for the wind.

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God, and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth.

Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for He has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed. Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error.

Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also Hevel. But fear God. Well, that's what we're, Lord willing, going to be covering this morning.

Listen now to the psalmist in Psalm 66. This is dedicated to the chief musician. It is a song and a psalm which we had time to go into the distinctions between the miscalls and the songs and the psalms.

But he says, Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth. Sing out the honor of His name. Make His praise glorious.

Say to God, How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You. They shall sing praises to Your name.

Come and see the works of God. He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land.

They went through the river on foot. There we will rejoice in Him. He rules by His power forever.

His eyes observe the nations. Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah O bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise to be heard.

Who keeps our soul among the living and does not allow our feet to be moved? For You, O God, have tested us. You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net.

You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water, but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.

I will go into Your house with burnt offerings. I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble. I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals.

With the sweet aroma of rams, I will offer bulls with goats. Selah Come and hear all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me. He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me. You'll recall in what we have covered in Ecclesiastes so far that, among other things, Solomon made the point that God does what He does to cause men to fear before Him. Remember in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, right after the poem about a time for this and a time for that, what's the very next observation that he makes? Where is the profit to the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the answer, the God-given answer with which the sons of men are to be answered.

You remember we had to correct this because throughout Ecclesiastes this word is translated task or occupation. This is the Hebrew word inyon, I-N-Y-A-N. It is from the root anah, A-N-A-H.

The lexicon, if you go to the lexicon, it has a whole separate entry. It says, well, there's one kind of anah. In fact, it has three different entries for anah.

The first one it says means to answer or to respond. The second one was created just for Ecclesiastes. It says, well, there aren't any other examples anywhere, but in Ecclesiastes it means occupation or task.

And then there is a third root that means to afflict or to oppress, task to be afflicted or to be oppressed. But the forms, because that's found so often in the passive, are quite different for that third, which is a legitimate separate word. We have homonyms that sound the same but have different meanings.

Did I say that correctly? Isn't that what a homonym is? Synonyms mean the same but are different words. Homonyms sound the same but have different things. I always think of the word log because it can be a fallen tree trunk.

It can be a book in which you keep a record. And, of course, the verb forms, you can log, meaning you're going to go cut down trees and bring the logs to the sawmill. Or you can log events by writing them down in a journal, very same spelling, and the verb takes the same form in all of its tenses, but it means entirely different things.

Well, here we have ana, and I do not believe that there is this separate meaning found only in Ecclesiastes. I think it comes from the original root ana, which means to answer and respond. Every time we find this word in Ecclesiastes, it comes right after a question has been asked.

We first found it back in Chapter 1 where verse 13 follows the question that is asked in verse 3. What profit does a man have from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? Then he talks about the cyclical nature of what we see under the sun. And he says, I, the preacher, king over Israel and Jerusalem, set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. He wants to answer the question that was asked in verse 3. What is the profit? How can you make something last and have it not be hebo, vapor, that vanishes, to be impermanent and temporary and something that does not last beyond death, beyond the setting of the sun? And he says this grievous answer that God has given to the sons of men with which to be answered, the answer is that nothing lasts, nothing is permanent.

He says this is the first thing when people look around and begin to question the meaning of life. The first answer they come to is, well, I'm just like the animals. And this is a theme to which Solomon has returned in subsequent passages, isn't it? When we came down to Chapter 3 and he gave the poem about there being a season and a time for every purpose, this, once again, returns to the theme of Chapter 1, the cyclical nature of life.

There's a time to build up, but then there's a time to tear down. There's a time to plant and a time to reap. And it just goes sort of in circles.

And it's appropriate there. You need to plant and you need to reap. You need to build up.

You need to tear down. You need to gather. You need to cast away.

It's not that these things are not legitimate anymore, that it isn't legitimate for the streams to flow to the sea and return to their origins. Or for the wind to blow and return on its circuit. Or any of the things that were noted in Chapter 1. This is a God-given scenario.

God set up the universe. God set up the way the world works and put man in it. But He also put eternity in our hearts to cause us to question, to try to go beyond what we see, to go beyond the mundane and the visible and ask the question, isn't there something more? And so He returns in Chapter 3, verse 9, and He says, What profit does the worker have from that in which he labors? The very same question that was posed at the outset that states the theme of the book.

Where is the profit? And once again in verse 10, we have, I have seen the God-given answer with which the sons of men are to be answered. You ask the question and if you look around at the answer that comes first to hand and first to mind, it's unsatisfactory. You don't want to just toil your life away and just enjoy the moment but not have anything that lasts.

You don't want everything to just be heavy. A vapor can be a beautiful thing. Have you ever been in an airplane on a longer type of flight where they get up high and it can be a drizzly, gray, foggy day down below? And it never occurred to me to think about the fact that the sun was shining up above those clouds but when you get in a plane and fly and you rise up through all the gray clouds for a while, you can't see anything at all and then you get up above and you have this cottony looking landscape down below you and there's a bright sun shining down below.

It's all doom and gloom but up above you have this great and the landscape up there is beautiful. It almost looks like a second earth sometimes. There will be flat spaces where it looks like a desert and then cloud mountains and cloud valleys and it's just incredible.

I think it's an incredible time in which we live to be able to see that kind of thing. People for thousands of years never saw the beauty of what God was doing on the tops of the clouds. All we ever saw was the underside which can also be beautiful.

Mist in the morning. A lot of times if you get up early and run or walk or something when the sun is first coming up and if you have any kind of ponds or bodies of water nearby, the mist that rises in the early morning light can be very beautiful but it doesn't last. The clouds are constantly changing shape.

The mist evaporates and it can be enjoyable at the moment but it's impermanent. You can't even really take good pictures of it or paint good pictures of it. It just doesn't do it justice.

Well, this is what Solomon is saying. This impermanence of everything is a grievous answer.

There's got to be more to life than just the momentary satisfactions and enjoyments that we experience.

And so he begins to introduce the answer in verse 11 of chapter 3 where he says, God has made everything beautiful. There is a good that is beautiful. There is a lasting, everlasting type of good.

It's the good that God does. God has put eternity in our hearts. He's let us know that there is such a thing as permanence.

There is such a thing as lasting, intrinsic good that goes beyond the cycling of the sun. It is not good for man simply to rejoice and do good in his life and to eat and drink and enjoy the good of all of his labor. This is given by God.

We are conceived in iniquity. We're born in sin. We live in a fallen world.

What was the consequence of sin in the garden? In the day that you eat thereof, what happens? Death. What is death? Death is something ending. Death means it's not permanent anymore.

The garden could have gone on indefinitely. Adam and Eve could have lived indefinitely, without end, eternally, except for sin. Sin renders life impermanent.

Sin makes human life heathen. Sin renders human activity and human effort heathen. Heathen came in in the garden with sin.

And God has let us know that. So it is not good to just rejoice and do good in your life. But this is what is given by God.

And so this is the challenge. This is what creates the question, Where is the prophet? How can you lay hold of eternity? And he talks about God. Here's a place where there is permanence.

The first time that Solomon talks about something that's not heaven, something that actually lasts, is in 3.14. I know whatever God does, it shall be forever. Don't have to add to it. Don't take from it.

God does it. Why? That men should fear before Him. Our Scripture reading this morning, Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth.

Sing out the honor of His name. Make His praise glorious. Say to God, How awesome are Your works.

Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You. They shall sing praises to Your name.

Come and see the works of God. He is awesome in His doings toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land.

They went through the river on foot. What is this a reference to? It's the Exodus. Again, I mentioned the physics of getting the entire nation of Israel across the Red Sea in one night that was mentioned in this little interesting email.

It has been estimated that in order to get these couple million people across in one night, which is what the Bible says God did, it's not just... Even Cecil B. DeMille, as great as the Ten Commandments movie is with the water going back and this narrow channel through, this would have needed to be about three miles wide to march 5,000 people abreast continuously all night long to get everyone across just figuring they've got a lot of estimations in there how wide was the sea, how many people were there, and so on. But this is no small thing. This is an awesome, mighty work of God.

What is it a metaphor to represent? What does the crossing of the Red Sea represent? The blood of the Passover lamb and the passing of death through the land and sparing Israel because of the blood is the picture of salvation. What is the passage through the sea a picture of? Well, if you know your epistles, you know that Paul talks about this as an analogy to baptism. And actually so does Peter.

Probably Peter is more specific in this regard. But both Paul and Peter refer to this. And what is baptism? Should we all just get water baptized because it's like going through the Red Sea? They passed on dry ground, but crossing the sea leaves Egypt and the Egyptians behind.

It is death to the old way of life. It is new life toward God. And that's what baptism teaches.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things are become new.

Israel is free of the power of Egypt once they get to the other side of the sea. The armies of Pharaoh drown. They are out of that land.

They are beyond the borders. Perhaps the Egyptians are not going to go the long way around and come pursue them. So when he says, Come and see the works of God, he is awesome in his doing toward the sons of men, turning the sea into dry land and they go through the river on foot.

This is God's power delivering us from the old life, which is being dead and trespasses in sin, into a life where we can lay hold of eternal things. We can bear an eternal weight of glory. That's what the passage through the sea represents.

He doesn't refer back to the Passover, does he? He refers to the baptism because it's God's act in giving us the ability to lay hold of eternity. That's what baptism represents. Death.

You die to death and you live to life. There we will rejoice in him. This is our place to rejoice.

We don't rejoice in our own works. We don't rejoice in what we accomplish in this life. We rejoice

standing on the banks of the sea and seeing that God has delivered us from the bondage and the operational death that represented our old life.

We have the ability to lay hold of that eternity that God has put in our hearts. He rules by His power forever. His eyes observe the nations.

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah. Now why is this in the Psalm? I ask you this question.

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Can you really stop the rebellious from exalting themselves? You can't, can you? In the same way that when Paul, when we were studying Colossians, and he said do not let people speak of your good as evil. Well, you can't really control what people say.

He says do not let your good be spoken of as evil. But you can't really control that. So what is he saying? Do not let what people say about your good when they call it evil, don't let that be a reality for you.

Don't be influenced by that. Don't let that become a factor that changes you. We've been talking recently about not being changed, not being diverted from the path of righteousness and pursuing our upward call in Christ because of what people think or because of what people observe or because of what they say.

And even in secular life, people acknowledge the fact that others only have as much power over you as you grant them. And in the psychological arena, this is certainly true. People only have as much power as you give them.

Someone may look askance at you, but if you don't give a flying hoot and a rain barrel what they think, then all of their opinion in the world, they're just spitting in the wind. They can rant and frown and say whatever they want to say, but if you completely, totally don't care what they think, then it's sound and fury signifying nothing. Well, the same thing here.

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. The reason the psalmist puts a sila here is you have to stop and think about this point. How can you not let the rebellious exalt themselves? Who are the rebellious and what are they rebelling against? They're rebelling against the presence and the power and the plan of God.

They have got their own agenda. They've got their own ideas about what's important and what constitutes an accomplishment. And they are going to exalt themselves where the psalmist is calling for man to exalt God.

They say, no, we're going to rebel against that idea. We're going to exalt ourselves. He says, don't waste your time thinking about that.

Don't be swayed. Don't be sucked in. Don't be sucked into an organization.

Don't be sucked into a viewpoint. Don't be sucked into a philosophy of life where people are not acknowledging the power and the person of God and are instead exalting themselves. Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves.

Don't acknowledge that. Don't become part of it. Don't let it sway you.

Bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise to be heard, who keeps our soul among the living and does not allow our feet to be moved. We just sang that song this morning, I Shall Not Be Moved. For you, O God, have tested us, you've refined us as silver is refined.

By the way, how is silver refined? Some things are refined by the process. Petroleum is refined by putting it in the presence of a catalyst and causing the different components of the petroleum to settle out. You skim off the gasoline and you get tars and you get oils and all different kinds of things out of petroleum.

The catalyst does that. Silver is refined by heating. It has a melting point that is lower than the impurities that are in the ore in which silver is found.

So by heating it up to a certain temperature, the silver unites with itself as a liquid and the impurities begin to float because even though they have a higher melting point, they have a lower density. And so as you liquefy the silver, the impurities, which have not melted, but are kind of like wood floating on water, they're going to come to the surface. And so as they float to the surface, they're skimmed away and the silver is left behind.

Well, the hotter you heat the silver, the more liquid it becomes, the less viscous it is, and the easier it is for impurities, who have just a slightly lesser density, to rise to the top. So the higher you heat it, the thinner the silver gets, if you will, and more impurities are going to rise to the top to be skimmed away. So it is a tricky prayer to pray, to say, Oh Lord, refine me like silver.

If God refines you like silver, what's He doing? He's heating you up. He's liquefying you so that your impurities surface. Well, this is not necessarily a pleasant process.

I don't necessarily like... It's kind of like having an operation to get a tumor out. You know there's a tumor in there, but in order to get to it, somebody's got to slice you open. Well, the slicing portion is not good, but getting the tumor out is good.

An infection, I can't help but think about Dan working on teeth, and you've got a bad spot in your tooth, or you've got an abscess or something, you've got to have a root canal. You have to go through some process that's not necessarily pleasant. I mean, Dan makes it the least unpleasant of anybody I've ever had to have work on me.

But, you know, nobody says, Boy, you know what I'd really like to do today is go down and sit in a

dentist chair, and get numbed up, and have somebody drill and file, and smell that smell of singed enamel. I could go to Six Flags, or I could go to the water park, but I think I'll go down and see if there's something they can do in my mouth. I mean, nobody does that.

Well, it's the same thing with the refining process. We don't ask God and say, Oh God, refine me, heat me up, throw me into the fire, and let's burn away the impurities. But that's what God does.

And so when we find ourselves in that position, we should recognize that there is a purpose. There is a reason why God does this. And not to panic.

You have brought us into the net. You laid affliction on our backs, he says in 66:11. You have caused men to ride over our heads.

Now, is there any way you can make this pleasant? Have men ride roughshod over your head? I can't think of a scenario where this would be a pleasant... You know, I think of the Ben-Hur chariot race scene where the stuntman actually died because men rode over his head with horses. We went through fire and through water. You know, James Taylor, I've seen fire and I've seen rain.

Well, this is going through fire and going through water. This is the refining process. You heat it up and then you temper it.

You heat it up and then you temper it. You brought us out to richness, to rich fulfillment. The end is worth the process.

And so the psalmist says, I will go into your house with burnt offerings. I will pay you my vows. Where did these vows come from? Why would someone make a vow? What's the most famous vow in the Old Testament? Think about the book of Judges.

Who made a vow? Remember Jephthah and Jephthah's daughter? The pressure was on. Israel was being attacked and he was asked to come out of retirement and go lead the armies. Not so much out of retirement as sort of out of obscurity or disfavor.

They said, you come and lead the armies against these enemies. And so Jephthah was pretty sure that they were going to get their helmets handed to them. And so he went to the Lord.

He said, Lord, if you'll allow us to win, I will sacrifice to you the first thing I see when I return, which was a dumb thing to say. But once you make that kind of statement, I mean, if you don't learn anything else from the story of Jephthah, God pays attention to what we say and he does not take it lightly. He doesn't say, oh, well, you were foolish and ignorant.

I know you didn't really mean it. Jephthah had to pay that vow when his daughter came out. She was the first thing he saw.

He probably thought, well, it'll be one of my livestock. I'll come to the edge of the field and see one of my great prize bulls or I'll see my great ram of the flock or something and whatever the first thing is I encounter when I get to the edge of my property. But instead, all the animals were elsewhere and the first thing that came rushing out was his daughter.

Well, a vow is a vow. And we are very cavalier in what we say to God and what we speak before God. But the Old Testament saints had a much better conception of the importance of converse with God.

And the psalmist says the same thing. I will pay you my vows which my lips have uttered. But when are these vows made? They're made under pressure, aren't they? We're not going along in a big boat floating on the Sea of Prosperity saying, well, I think I'll make a vow to God.

We make a vow when the chips are down, when we come to some point of crisis in our life and we say, Lord, if you'll just get me out of this, I promise you I will do X, Y, and Z. Well, that's a vow. If you'll make my crops come in, if you'll... And generally people would make vows because they were concerned with the affairs of this life. They had two bad years of crops in a row and if the third year was bad, it would put them out of business.

They'd have to indenture themselves. If they could not win a victory, they would go into slavery. And so they would go to God and sort of bargain with God.

A vow was, let's enter into an agreement where I contribute something so that you will contribute something. That's what this vowing has to do. I will pay you my vows which my lips have uttered.

And the Bible does not condemn this practice. It just says if you're going to make a vow, you had better keep it. My mouth spoke this when I was in trouble.

I will offer you burnt sacrifices of fat animals with the sweet aroma of rams. I will offer bulls with goats, sila. And once again, he has us pause and reflect on the importance of remembering what was said in a time of crisis to God and bringing apparently a lot of times people would vow something beyond their normal responsibilities in terms of sacrifice.

They said, I will. You almost get this idea when Solomon is dedicating the temple and so many animals are slaughtered, he may have had a vow and said, Lord, if you'll help us bring this thing to completion, I will offer 1,000 bulls and all of these animals that were offered. This may have been the fulfillment of a vow because God allowed them to get the cedar and the gold and all the other things that were necessary to bring that huge project to completion.

And then the final section of the psalm, come and hear all you who fear God and I will declare what he has done for my soul. These people who are coming, where are they coming? Well, look at verse 13, they're going to the house of God. They're going to the temple or the tabernacle depending on when this psalm was written.

But they're going to the house of God where the offerings are offered. And he says, come and hear all you who fear God because while I'm down here paying my vow and offering these sacrifices, I'm going to declare what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth.

This is referring back to the time of trouble. And the cry to God included the vow. He was extolled with my tongue.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. The same thing you have over in Hebrews 10. You've got to come before God with a clean conscience, with a heart that's been sprinkled and washed.

Certainly God has heard me. What's he saying? I don't have unconfessed sin in my life. I'm not continuing evil practices in an unrepentant fashion.

I do not regard iniquity in my heart because if I did, the Lord wouldn't hear me. But the argument is God has heard me. Therefore, you can conclude something about the psalmist.

He is not regarding iniquity in his heart. God attended the voice of his prayer. And he says, blessed be God who has not turned away my prayer or his mercy from me.

Well, as we return now back to Ecclesiastes chapter 4, where we now find ourselves, chapter 5 is going to begin with this exhortation. Walk prudently when you go to the house of God. Sort of the same thing that we have in Psalm 66.

Things are happening down at the house of God. This is where we look to take hold of things that go beyond this life. To find the good answer to this question that Solomon is asking.

But we need to back up just a little bit because chapter 4 was looking at different kinds of oppression under the sun. It is often a bad circumstance that really wakes us up to the need for coming to God. We can get apathetic and indifferent.

Just look at the history of the church. Anytime things are good, the church seems to go astray. And then under persecution and oppression, everybody begins to really seek God out.

One of the most difficult tests to pass for an individual believer or for a generation of believers is the prosperity test. When you're not under pressure, when you're not under adversity, whether it's financial adversity or persecution adversity, to continue to prioritize God and the things of God when there's not a compelling crisis. That is a very good test of what our real motivations and what our real priorities are.

Chapter 4 tells us about different types of injustice and bad conditions which might cause someone to raise their head and say, there's got to be more to life than this. People who are rich, we just studied in Luke about the parable of the foolish rich man who says, well, I've run out of room for my crops. I'm going to have to tear down my barns and build larger ones.

And he never asks himself the question, why am I doing this? He's just completely absorbed. And Jesus told the disciples, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He's not talking about to get saved.

Let's talk about a believer who is rich in the things of this world. Believers may or may not enter the kingdom, whether you're talking about Old Testament saints or New Testament saints. Why would it be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom? Because a rich man doesn't have a sense of need.

He's got all kinds of things to distract him and occupy his mind. Well, my barn's full. I'm going to have to build another one.

How can I swing this business deal? I've got all of these opportunities and I can take pleasure in that. I think there was a lot of thought provocation in the movie that we saw. What was the name of that movie we just saw that y'all loaned us? Family Man, where Nicolas Cage is a successful Wall Street executive and he's going along, he's brokering million and billion dollar deals.

And then he commits a random act of kindness and for this he's granted the chance to go get a glimpse of how he could have had a better life, which you can argue with the theology of that, but it does give an excuse for him to suddenly find himself in an alternate timeline. If he had decided to marry some gal instead of going abroad, becoming a big financial analyst, what would have happened? And he finds himself at the opposite end of the financial spectrum with a lot of intangible riches, a family, the respect of his friends, the love of his wife, great children in whom he gets satisfaction, instead of all of this business. And at first it takes him a while to realize the value of those things.

He doesn't immediately recognize it. He wants to go back. He says, I don't want to be a tire salesman in Jersey.

I want to be a great Wall Street executive. And this is an illustration of the same point. Even in the secular world they recognize that you can become so caught up in the things of this life that you don't really recognize what is of value.

So that's why Chapter 4 precedes what we're going to study in Chapter 5 because you go back and see this Hevel under the sun in Verse 7. There's one alone without companion. He has neither son nor brother. There's no end to all of his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches.

And then it doesn't say, but he never asks. You can understand the intention of the translators here to try to smooth this out and have it read well, but that stuff in italics isn't there. The next verse, and the versification is actually a little different in Hebrew, but it just says, For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? And Solomon just lapses into the first person here because this can be true even if you actually do have a son or a companion, even if you are married.

You can be single-mindedly pursuing your labors and the riches that you accumulate, you're always looking for more. There's another big deal just over the horizon. There's another great investment.

There's another opportunity to parlay and leverage what you have into something more to better your position, to solidify your portfolio, and so on. And whether there actually is a son or a brother or a companion is really beside the point. The point is in the mind of this person, they're not even in the picture.

This is single-minded occupation or preoccupation with gain. For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? People will often cry the blues and say, I'm down here 14, 16, 18 hours a day. I see people leaving at 5 o'clock, and I'm here till 8, 9, 10 o'clock at night.

And who am I doing this for? And the translators here say, he never asks this question. Well, actually, the question is asked. It's asked right here.

His eye is not satisfied. For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? This is Hevel and a grave misfortune, it says in the New King James. Well, what's the point here? For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? Why do I make the sacrifices I make to do these things? That is the question.

So then you say, well, he's talking about companionship. Well, you ought to have a companion in this, and he goes on in verse 9. Because the first thing is the companionship of material goods is sort of cold comfort. So you say, well, how about relationships? Is that where the joy is? And he says, well, two are better than one.

They have a good reward for their labor. And then there are three different situations. If accident occurs, there's someone there to help you.

If adversity occurs, cold temperatures, there's someone there to help you. If opposition arises, here it's in the form of someone attacking. So you've got three different circumstances where having someone else there makes it easier to get through it.

Here you have this adversity. And first of all, if you manage to get on top, if you wind up being able to labor and gain riches and just keep on asking more, then you don't really feel the adversity. The rich say, let them eat cake.

They're on top of it. If you do wind up being subject to either accident, adversity, or opposition, and those are the three things that are illustrated here in verses 10 through 12, having a companion there can make it seem like, well, those are not so bad. And so you turn to companionship.

You can be like John Lennon. All you need is love. You've got a companion there.

And then the accident, the adversity, or the opposition is tolerable. You've got someone there. Then verse 13 introduces a third scenario, a third side of this idea of this Hevel under the sun, this what do you do in adversity.

Well, you can either succeed through material gain and not have to worry about it. You can get companionship and not have to worry about it. And then we have a third situation in verse 13.

Well, this is going to require a little bit more time than what we have left in the first session, so we'll resume here when we come back. But here's the real question, and it's posed in our Scripture reading over in Psalm 66. What should the response be whether you achieve success in this life or whether you do suffer adversity, accident, or opposition? It is to recognize that God put eternity in your heart for a reason and to turn your eyes to the Lord.

We have that great song, Turn Your Eyes on Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. And that is what this grievous answer that God has given the sons of men to be answered with is supposed to do.

It is a means of turning our eyes to God, to recognize Him, to praise Him. We sing the doxology every Sunday morning. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise Him, all creatures here below, and praise Him above, you heavenly hosts. Praise the three members of the Trinity. And when you sing those other verses, why? Because He's good, He's worthy, He is eternal, we are temporal, He is ever intrinsically good, and we are ever fallen and failing.

And that's what Solomon pointed out back in chapter 3, that God gives us this situation to show us that we're like the animals. Our life breath can go down just like theirs does. And there is a difference, there's a distinction between us and between God, and God is the issue.

Well, this ought to be happening regularly in our daily life. If we pause and meditate, we will remember who we are and why we're here, who we serve, and where the genuine and lasting substance of life is to be found. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to take a look at this third, very interesting illustration of that idea in Ecclesiastes chapter 4.