

01-09-16a Ecclesiastes

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study this morning to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you that we are alive and remain to this point.

We thank you for the potential that that grants to us to avail ourselves of your grace, to make progress in your plan and to redeem the time, even though the days are evil. We thank you for the country in which we live. We pray that you will continue to guide our leadership in this difficult hour.

And we ask your blessing on us as we study together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding into the truth of your word. We pray that we can focus on our mission, on the calling that we have from you in Christ Jesus, that we will keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at your right hand.

We pray that in everything he will be glorified. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the book of Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 23. Many times when you go to Proverbs, you find a scattering of aphorisms or pithy sayings or seemingly unrelated verses that are perhaps only loosely bound together. This chapter is something of an exception in that it sort of hangs together as a chapter, even reading it in English without a lot of analysis.

And it bears directly on the section of Ecclesiastes we're going to look at this morning because it has to do with the attitude we take toward priorities in this life. What do we consider to be important? Is it influence? Is it favor? Is it security? What do we pursue as we go through the day? Let's read Proverbs 23, and that will become clear. In the New King James, Proverbs 23 says, When you sit down to eat with a ruler, this doesn't mean, you know, a 12-foot stick.

My dad used to tell a poem about eating peas with a knife. He got to use honey to get them to stick on there. But this is a person in authority.

And right away at the very outset, when it says, You sit down to eat with someone in authority, what is this? This is potential in the earthly realm. You have an invitation to an exclusive place. You have the opportunity to make something more of your position in your station than what you currently have.

So just bear that in mind as we go through that this is not something you routinely do. A door has been opened. This is a window of opportunity that people feel the need to seize on.

Here's a special chance. When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies,

for they are deceptive food.

Do not overwork to be rich. Because of your own understanding, cease. Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings.

They fly away like an eagle toward heaven. Do not eat the bread of a miser. If you look at your text note in the New King James, it says do not eat the bread of one who has an evil eye.

Nor desire his delicacies, for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. Eat and drink, he says to you, but his heart is not with you. The morsel you have eaten you will vomit up and waste your pleasant words.

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words. Do not remove the ancient landmark, nor enter the fields of the fatherless. For their redeemer is mighty.

He will plead their cause against you. Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge. Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.

You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from Sheol. My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice. Indeed, I myself, yes, my inmost being, will rejoice when your lips speak right things.

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the Lord all the day. For surely there it will not be cut off. Hear, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way.

Do not mix with winebibbers or with gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will crags. Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and do not sell.

Also wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her who bore you rejoice.

My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. For a harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well. She also lies in wait as for a victim, and increases the unfaithful among men.

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly.

Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of a mast, saying, They

have struck me, but I was not hurt. They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake that I may seek another? And they had drink, which is not there. Well, the uniting theme of all the material in this chapter, and it continues into chapter 24, is pursuing things that belong to this world, and in particular to the short-sighted people who have pursued those things ahead of us themselves. The ruler has got power, he's got riches, he's invited you to his table, and there's a knife up to want to grab hold of those things.

And he says, Put a knife to your throat, if you have an appetite for what he can potentially offer. Because what are you of God? You've taken your eyes off of heavenly things, and you've focused them on earthly things. You say, This man is going to be my means of promotion.

This is going to be my means of security, or my means of obtaining the things that I want. He says, Put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

Our purpose this morning in our sort of special from Ecclesiastes, which is going to be in the series of Ecclesiastes, but we have a chance this morning, we're just about halfway through what Solomon has to say, is to take a look at what he has said thus far in the book, in the first five chapters, and see where it is he's going. The specific portion we're going to be looking at is at the end of chapter five and into the beginning of chapter six. And this is what Solomon has concluded.

Ecclesiastes, as you will remember, is a much misunderstood book. And it has been, in many cases, incorrectly or unfortunately translated. It has been incorrectly and unfortunately interpreted.

And it begins with the King James vocabulary for the Hebrew word hevel or havel, depending on the place in the sentence and how it's used. H-B-L are the consonants. And this is the word in Hebrew that means vapor.

What is the essential characteristic of a vapor? If you were going to symbolize something as a vapor, what do you think about? It doesn't mean what the King James translates it as, which is vanity. Everybody knows the beginning of Ecclesiastes. What does it say? After the words of Solomon and so on, it says, Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanity.

All is vanity, saith the preacher. You've got five havel in that very first line of the content there. And as soon as you decide that what is vanity? Vanity is something that is a waste of time.

It had no business being there. Vapor is not the same as vanity. Vapor is a necessary thing.

If there was no such thing as vapor, our skies would always be clear. There would never be any rain. There would never be dew.

There would never be combustion in a gasoline engine or any other kind of engine because vapor can be very beneficial. The essential characteristic of vapor is what? It's temporary. How long can you maintain a vapor? You spray aerosol into a room.

It used to be all the air spray came in spray cans before we got worried about fluorocarbons in the hole in the ozone and all that. I was glad that vapor was temporary because you go in the bathroom after somebody else has been in there and sprayed their hair and there's hairspray hanging in the air. If you happen to walk past as they are spraying their hair, you would get one side of your face not as responsive as the other.

The vapor is a temporary thing, and we appreciate that about vapor. Clouds change. Clouds come and go and bring rain.

That's the essential characteristic. So the theme that Solomon sets out at the beginning of the book is ultimate impermanence. It's the vapor of vapors.

And when you talk about the doubling of a word in Hebrew that way, it is for emphasis. It says this is the ultimate in that category. So when it says, if I can sort of roughly go into English, of havel, havel havelim, it means this is the ultimate vapor.

If you want to talk about something temporary, everything under the sun is temporary. If you are pursuing things in this life, if you're pursuing accomplishments, influence, status, all of the things that make up good old American civilization, it's all temporary. None of this is going to last.

You go over to Peter and he says, Don't you know that the elements are going to melt with a fervent heat? The whole universe is going to be rolled up like a scroll. It's all temporary. Well, this is not a subject that really came up in the law of Moses.

Think about the history of the Old Testament. What Bible existed in David and Solomon's day? Had the five books of Moses, the Torah, some of the early portions of the Psalms, the ones that David wrote and that, and probably the book of Job, maybe one or two other incipient things. But basically you have the law.

You have the books of Moses. How much attention is paid there to the ephemeral and transient nature of life? You can't get much more concrete than Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. This is what you do.

This is how you perform a sacrifice. This is how you observe a feast. This is how you treat the stranger and the alien and the widow and the fatherless and your fellow Israelite and the stranger that is within your gates.

It's all a concrete, this is how you get through your day. That's what their Bible gave them. Solomon, with the wisdom that God gave him, is reaching beyond the mundane, reaching beyond

what the physical instructions for life are and saying, what's the point? What are we trying to accomplish as we observe the law? What is the great failure in Israel? What does Paul indict Israel for in Romans? Having a form of righteousness instead of pursuing the righteousness of God.

Israel was blind and deaf and calloused-hearted, stiff-necked when it came to the things of God. They were pursuing their own righteousness. They didn't understand God's purpose and God's goal.

And all of this law observation and all of the sacrifice and all of the self-denial and the sackcloth and ashes and everything else that they went through, it's all vapor. It all went up in smoke. The generation that dropped in the wilderness, what did they accomplish? Did they lay hold of anything permanent? In the metaphoric picture that you have of Israel coming out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb, you learn so much about the life of individual believers from Adam to the present.

And there is an opportunity to lay hold of the fulfillment of God's covenant promises. That's pictured in Israel by going into the land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That generation was delivered under the blood.

They're saved. They were baptized. They all drank from the same rock.

They ate the same spiritual food. They drank from that rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ, it tells us in the New Testament. And yet those people, with two exceptions, dropped in the wilderness and did not lay hold of what God had for them that was permanent.

That's what Proverbs 23 is talking about. If you look at these things as your goal, as what you're after, if you've got an appetite for that, he says, you better put a knife to your throat. It would be better to cut your throat than to eat from that table and hobnob with the rich and the mighty and pursue those things.

Well, this is a pretty powerful message to deliver in Old Testament days. They had a hard enough time, it would seem, just becoming a nation and figuring out how to be obedient in the mundane areas of life, the daily chores of life. But this is the same thing we find when we look at training children, isn't it? When children start out, we don't address them with deep concepts of loyalty and duty and altruistic motivation and so forth.

We say, do what you're supposed to do or I'm going to spank your bottom. Obey me when I say, do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, or I will have to discipline you. That's what God gave Israel in the law.

The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. So, in the intermediate phase, after Israel is in the land, the monarchy begins, you have David, now you have Solomon. Now, we have already

laid the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God, as the author of Hebrews says.

And who's he talking to? He's talking to the Hebrews. He's talking to Israel. We've got this foundation.

Let's go on to maturity. Well, Solomon, as the wisest man that ever lived in Old Testament days, that's what he's trying to do. It's such a tragedy that Ecclesiastes has been sort of dismissed as the ramblings of Solomon when he married too many women and got out of fellowship and he drank and be married for tomorrow we die.

It's tragic because this is God's communication to Israel through their wisest king, their wisest prophet, the son of David, in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Judah to David and foreshadowing in a sense being David's son, the greater son that is to come. Trying to bring the people of God to the place of seizing, laying hold of eternal things instead of temporal things. And Solomon gives us the same thing over in Proverbs 23.

You've got to watch out. Don't let these things seduce you. Don't let them occupy your mind.

Well, we say I haven't been invited to Donald Trump's table lately. President Bush hasn't asked me over. I haven't been asked to any influential person's table.

But what is the principle? Are there opportunities that come to us? We can think of ones in the past. We might be able to think of some in the present. Or we can anticipate that some will come in the future.

And are these things that are going to occupy our minds and are in our idle moments? It's like somebody in a romance when people get infatuated. Anytime they're not immediately engaged in a task and there's a little bit of idle time, their mind just returns to the person they love, to the thing that they consider important, someone that has a passion for a hobby or a passion for accomplishing something. I want to get my house built or I want to get my car refurbished or something.

Whatever it is that you really set as your focus and as your priority, it occupies your mind in idle moments. Well, do we have things like that and it has nothing to do with God or the things of God? We don't put it into a context of eternal things, whether or not God is pleased as we accomplish these. This is what Solomon is warning about in Proverbs 23.

And as we'll see, if you'll turn back over to Ecclesiastes chapter 5 now, there's a lot I could say about Proverbs 23, but then I would never get back to Ecclesiastes. And my whole endeavor would be havel, which is be a vapor here in God. So I want to get back to Ecclesiastes chapter 5. And watch for the similarity that you see here.

Who is the influential one who does need to be pleased? If you were going to sit down at

someone's table and have a genuine opportunity to please, it would be God's table, wouldn't it? Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Wouldn't we like to sit down at God's table and cultivate His approval, be approved in His sight, receive from His riches? Well, chapter 5 says, Walk prudently when you go to the house of God. Draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

What a tragic thing to go to the house of God and wind up accomplishing evil in the place where you're supposed to be pleasing God, where you're supposed to be worshiping Him and receiving His approval, His forgiveness, His riches of grace. And instead, you go down there because you're not walking prudently, and you create evil. It says, Draw near to hear rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools.

Well, what would the sacrifice of fools be? We know that what we should do when we draw near to the house of God. And what is the house of God in the Old Testament? That is the symbolic location of the presence of God, isn't it? That's where the mercy seat, the ark of the covenant, the holy of holies in Jerusalem, in Solomon's day, that's where all of that is. Draw near to the house of God is literally in his day to draw near to the temple.

By extension, any of us who read Hebrews chapter 10, we draw near to God with a clean heart, a clear conscience, full assurance of faith, having been sprinkled and cleansed and so forth. It's the same idea. When we come to God to worship, and this is not just coming to church, this is in our approach to God as His people, we need to draw near to hear.

What's the point here? God sets the agenda. Who is it that says how it needs to be? Who's got the five-paragraph order? Who's got the plan? Is it us or is it God? Well, if you listen to a lot of public prayer in the Christian world today, you would think it's us because we come to God and we say, thank you, God, for all your many blessings. And now here's my list of what I want done.

And we present our petitions to God, and many times they are couched in terms of concrete answers. Please heal this person. Please fix this problem.

Please take away this pressure. Please solve all of these things. And, you know, God looks on the heart, and it isn't to say that there's not a place for petition and that there's not a place for, you know, the Bible says, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

But we need to be sure that these are requests. There are people who say, well, you know, if I just have enough faith, if two or three agree, then it has to happen. And it's like rubbing the lamp.

It's like, well, God has promised me three wishes, so here's what they are. And they don't come in the form of requests. They come in the form of demands.

They come in the form of this has to be what God has to do. I just can't conceive of my life or my

future without God accomplishing these things. And you wonder why people's faith gets shaken when they decide what the answer to the problem is, and they pray and they get a no answer from God, a negative answer, and they say, well, how could God let this happen to me? Well, what is the sacrifice of fools? We continue to read in chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes, Do not be rash with your mouth.

Do not let your heart utter anything hastily before God. God is in heaven. You are on earth.

Therefore, let your words be few. Yes, you can come with petition. Yes, you can come with request.

But as you meditate on these issues in the presence of God, as you bring them up, you don't need to be giving God all of the answers of how to fix it. You don't need to say a whole lot. It is enough to bring it.

Look at the example prayer Jesus gave the disciples. How long is that prayer? He gave it a couple of different times. You look at it in Luke, look at it in Matthew, look at even the longer version.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation. That's the whole prayer.

Let your words be few. Are there concerns and needs expressed in that prayer? Provision our daily bread. Help me with my attitude.

I know that in order to be forgiven, I've got to forgive others. And I know that this is a statement of acknowledgement that God forgives us as we forgive. If we do not forgive others, we ourselves are not forgiven.

So there's a great cycling of knowledge of God's plan and purpose in that. But it's brief. Good sermons, good Bible lessons ought to be brief.

Don't have to say a whole lot. Let your words be few. And then verse 3, it's not too clear the way it's translated here.

For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. Well, this literally says that this much activity in the earlier parts of Ecclesiastes, we've seen this before, where it says in Chapter 1, it's translated, it says, God, it is a grievous task that God has given the sons of men to be occupied with. And this is an assumption.

They think, well, this is an Aramaic word and it means a task. It isn't. It's the word for answer.

It's a perfectly good Hebrew word and it means answer. And it says, for the dream comes in many answers. This is the standard word for dream.

Dreams are generally, have a sort of a negative connotation in the Old Testament. We know that God occasionally spoke in dreams. But when it talks about other people having dreams, you go to the false prophet sections in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and it talks about them.

I have dreamed. I have dreamed. Do not listen to the false prophet when he comes to you saying, I have dreamed.

There's a lot of negative associated with this. And that's the case here. What is a dream? It's a view of things.

Many times dreams, people think, well, it's a foreshadowing. It's predictive. I was warned in a dream, like Joseph or the wise men, to go a different way or to go to Egypt or whatever.

Well, what is the context here? Be careful when you come to God. Let your words be few. What's the danger? You're going to offer the sacrifice of fools and your words are going to be many.

Well, if your words are many, what are you doing? You're giving your vision. You know, there's been a lot of talk in recent years in Christianity all around us about going to the Bible and taking a mistranslated verse and saying, well, without a vision the people perish. And I've got a vision.

We've got to have a vision to win the lost. We've got to have a vision to build our new building. We've got to have a vision to, you know, reupholster the pews or whatever it might be.

People say, well, I've got a vision. I've got a dream. I have a dream.

Well, this is what people do. The dream comes in many words. The sacrifice of fools is to come to God and give God your dream.

God, this is what I would like to see happen. This is how I view reality, future. If you'll just make this happen for me, I know my life is going to be great.

I will be happy. I'll be content. I think this is the best outcome.

And let me tell you all the details. The dream comes in many words. And it actually comes in many answers.

And the voice or sound of a fool in many words. So you have many answers and many words. This is two parallel lines.

You see this often in Proverbs where you have a line that states something and another line that states the same thing. Sometimes they're a contrast. Sometimes they say the same thing.

These two say the same thing. The dream comes in many answers and the sound of a fool in many words. So what is the dream? It's parallel to what? The sound of a fool, the voice of a fool.

So this is not a dream of revelation from God. It's not like, well, if you go and listen to many words at the temple, you're going to get God's dream or some such thing. People have tried to take it this way.

This is us taking our dream to God. What is a dream? It's as ephemeral as a vapor. It's just as impermanent.

It's just as insubstantial as a vapor. So a dream comes through many answers and the sound or voice of a fool in many words. He says, if you are going to say something to God, if you're going to make God a promise, if you're going to make a vow, do not delay to pay it.

For he has no pleasure in fools. And this word for no pleasure is a word that we've seen before. If you turn back a page in Ecclesiastes to chapter 3, verse 1, you know, they've got the song and all, to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven.

When we translated this in chapter 3, verse 1, we saw and we went over to the last words of David in 2 Samuel 23, this every purpose is kol chepets, C-H-E-P-E-T-S, chepets. And this is not really the word for purpose. The root verb means to take delight in, to take pleasure in, to be pleasing.

And the noun, chepets, means a desirable goal. And David uses this vocabulary in his last words when he says, there were many things that I wanted to accomplish as king in Israel that I and my house are called to in God's plan that were not caused to sprout. But God's eternal covenant is going to accomplish this.

My house, God says, has not been like the sun in the morning after a rain. My house has not been refreshing. There hasn't and there will not be.

You look at the house of David after David's day, and it's a curse rather than a blessing to Israel. The majority of his offspring are terrible kings and divert Israel and later Judah from the path. Well, chepets is the word that's used here.

He has no desirable goal in fools. There's nothing desirable in a fool. God can't accomplish his purpose with a fool.

It's not our purpose. It's not our dream. It's God's purpose.

It's God's plan that needs to be the focus. And if you're busy making a vow and you say, God, you know, I want this thing so bad, I'll chip in something. I'll give you something.

I'll perform a task. Let me put some earnest on the table. Here's my earnest money.

Let me put this down so that you'll be sure and answer my request. He says, you should come and be careful and let your words be few. If you are going to speak and if you're going to make God a promise, then you'd better keep it and don't delay because otherwise your words are the words of a fool.

And God, there's no desirable goal there. Pay what you have vowed. Better not to vow than to vow not pay.

Now, this makes sense on the surface, but this also, this type of logic also foreshadows what we see in chapter 6 of Ecclesiastes. You know, they say better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. And there's the idea that, well, if you at least, same thing that Theodore Roosevelt said when he said, the credit belongs to the man that's in the arena whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood and knows the great enthusiasms and great devotions in life.

And even if he fails, he fails while daring greatly so that he'll never be with these cold and timid souls that know neither victory nor defeat. Even if you try and fail, that's preferable to never having tried at all. Loving and losing and getting all kinds of pain and scars on your heart is better than not loving at all.

That's the conventional wisdom. Well, here, Solomon, under the ministry of the Spirit, says, it's better not to have ever vowed than to have vowed and not paid. In the New Testament, we have a similar concept where it says, those who have tasted of the power of God and the good things of the age to come, it would be better had they not known the way of truth than to have known it and returned back again like a dog returning to his vomit.

People have wrestled with that and they say, it would be better not to have been saved. It isn't talking about salvation. It's talking about here's someone that got saved and started down the road of God's plan and then fell back.

You know, the old Baptist thing, they were backsliders. It would be better to have never started down that road than to go partway and fall back. Jesus said, you put your hand on the plow and then turn back, you're not fit for the kingdom.

You lose your reward. It doesn't mean you're not saved. It means you've missed the point for which you were saved.

You're supposed to continue on and plow the furrow. You're supposed to go on down the road. Solomon says here, you're better off not making any promises.

Don't try to put God on the spot. Don't be trying to leverage your dream into the plan of God by making these rash promises. It's better not to promise at all than to promise and then not pay because instead of just being at zero, you're going to go into the red.

You're going to go into the negative. The same logic is going to occur again in a few verses hence. Why should God, and he says, do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin and do not say before the messenger, you can scratch out of God, that's not in there.

This is the malak. This is the representative of God. It could have been the priest in temple days.

It's someone who comes to collect. This is in common parlance. If you owed a debt to someone and you didn't pay it well, they would send their servant over and say, hey, the payment's due.

Where's your check? Where's the repayment of this loan? And the messenger comes and you say, oh, no, there must be some mistake. I didn't agree to pay that. There's a loophole in the contract here that says I don't have to do it.

He says, don't say to the messenger that comes to collect your debt, it was a mistake. And this word for mistake, you may remember over in the Law of Moses where it talks about the sin of the high hand and an unintentional sin. And there's a distinction.

And there was a sacrifice for unintentional sins. And there was a whole separate category of you create a big problem for yourself if you commit a sin of the high hand. And so this word here is the word for the unintentional sin.

He says it was unintentional. I goofed. I misspoke.

You misunderstood me. I didn't make myself clear. That's not really what I meant.

He says when the time comes for that debt to be collected, the messenger is standing at your door in the metaphor. Don't pervericate. Don't vacillate.

Don't say, well, there must be some misunderstanding. There must be some mistake. Why should God be angry at your excuse, it says, or at your voice, literally, and destroy the work of your hands? Then verse 7, and this has been just slaughtered from the Hebrew, and the Hebrew is difficult.

But it says here, For in the multitude of dreams and many words, there is also vanity, but fear God. Well, to be fair, this is a, like I say, this is a difficult verse. But let me give you a little bit of a smoother rendition of verse 7. Go back to verse 6. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin.

Do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake, it was unintentional. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? God can be angry because of what we say. When we come in and we have uttered things rashly before God.

Verse 7 says, Because by many dreams you are causing havel, havelim, by many dreams you are causing vapors and words to multiply. This is the hyphial, infinitive construct from the same word that is used, the noun form is translated many or much, rav, ravah. Hyphial is the causative

stem in Hebrew.

And the word order here emphasizes, and I'm trying to give you a translation that gives you the word order in Hebrew. Because in or by many dreams, vapors and words are caused to multiply, havelim. And Solomon has already given a real rich context for what havelim is.

Havelim is impermanent, it's ephemeral, it vanishes away and it's like chasing the wind or feeding on wind. Well, at the same time you multiply your words, you're multiplying vapors, you're multiplying havelim. For you are to fear God.

People get focused on what they want to see happen, what the desires of their heart are under the sun in this world. There are people praying now for survivors to be found, that their loved one will miraculously be there. That's all they can think about.

They've had people on TV who have gone to their inkjet printer and printed out a picture of their loved one. And from just day and night, they're walking the streets showing the picture, trying to find somebody who saw them, trying to, by their efforts, resurrect this person that is certainly long gone. There are over 5,000 people that perished in that disaster, in that catastrophe.

But there are people who, because they don't know for sure, their whole focus is, if I work hard enough, somehow I can bring this person back. Well, by many dreams, you are causing vapors and words to multiply. There is no tangible benefit to pursuing.

And all of the sympathy in the world to the bereaved people. But what is your focus in life? What is your priority? You have the opportunity as a believer, by faith and by patience and by confidence in God, even in a time of great crisis such as Job. Job did not print out pictures of his kids and go down to the site of his eldest son's house and ask the servants to keep digging in the rubble and see if anybody survived.

Job, in his affliction and in his series of disasters that took away everything he held dear in this life, maintained his faith in God. And that is why he shines in contrast to his four friends in that book. Well, by many dreams, you are causing havelim and divarim, words to multiply.

What is the contrast? You are to fear God. Give God the respect He is due. Give His plan and His purpose the place that it is due.

Don't go to God. I am often tempted to go to God with the plan of Sam. Oh, Lord, this is how I think it would be great.

I think it would be great if I had more time for this and didn't have to spend so much time on that. I would like to see this happen. Here is this problem with my car or problem with my house or problem with one thing or another.

Here is my issue at work. All of us have these concerns. Fear God.

Respect God. Give God His place. Know that God is in control.

There is nothing more gratifying than a child who accepts the decisions and the wisdom of their parent. They are in the house and you say, you know, I know you want to go do this fun thing or be with your friends or do this, that and the other. We really can't do that right now and I don't have time to explain.

And they just look at you and nod and say, okay, Dad, that's all right. They may be blinking back their tears, but they trust you. They know that you're not trying to hurt them.

You're not trying to deprive them. You're not being petty or insensitive. But you know more than they do.

You've got the priorities. And as hard as it may be for them, they just say, okay, you're in charge and I'll just accept it. I'll work within the parameters that I've got.

And that's what God wants from us. Fear God. Well, when you go on in Chapter 5 here, he says, If you see oppression of the poor, violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, this is again, this is the daily life everybody has.

You've got the government in view here. Don't marvel at the matter. One high official watches over another high official and there are higher officials over them.

And then verse 9 is another slaughtered translation. Moreover, the profit of the land is for all, even the king is served from the field. To make a long story short, what this is saying is, it is the cause for anger and frustration because where does the profit of the land come from? It's on the backs of the blue-collar workers.

It's the people who are putting in the blood and the sweat to pull the crops out of the soil to get the sheep and the goats and the cattle to thrive. And these people who have governmental authority skim it all and aggrandize it to themselves. And you have the oppression of the poor.

The poor are the ones who are bringing the wealth of the land out for the nation. And the government skims it all away. You know, excessively high taxes, tariffs, using authority, misusing authority, and one thing and another.

And people are very frustrated by this. And you think, well, I'm going to go take this to God. I've got the answer.

He's got to fix the government. He's got to let me keep what I earn. He's got to get rid of these egregious taxes and so on.

And then the last part that says, even the king is served from the field. I suspect that there has been a misdivision of the Hebrew words here. And what it's talking about is that instead of king

here, and it's a long story, but I will take it as it stands in the Masoretic text.

And the best sense you can make of this, which is not very good sense, is that the word for service is here. The word for field is here. This is territory.

And the beginning word that is melech for king, I think it has lost the preceding aleph. And it actually is talking about your labor. Your labor for the land seems like slavery.

All of these guys are skimming this off, and your labor in the land seems like slavery. Here's the viewpoint. What are these people doing that are taking this away from you? Even if you're poor and you say, well, my problem is I'm not getting these things.

I'm not getting the fruit of my labor. Just remember the people who are getting those things, if that's their goal, even if they appear to be succeeding, they are never going to be filled. This says satisfied.

It doesn't mean they have a sense of satisfaction. I think lots of evil people, drug lords and tax evaders and things, successful businessmen who just pursue the almighty dollar, they are satisfied. They love that, and they thrive on it.

They get up in the morning. That's what motivates them. This means they will not be filled.

They're not going to have something to take away that's permanent from that. He who loves abundance is not going to be filled with the increase because this is all vapor. Why win the battle and lose the war? You're standing on top and say, I got the most toys, and then you die, like Jesus pointed out in His parable of the rich man.

When goods increase, those increase who eat them. What profit do the owners have except to see them with their eyes? It's like a blink. You get all your tinker toys and all your building blocks in a pile, and you say, look at what I've got.

And it's like in the blink of an eye, it's gone because that's how brief human life is. It's just a vapor. It says the sleep of a laboring man is sweet.

And this is ev-ed. This is the same word that was used earlier in verse 9, talking about service. It seems like slavery.

Well, one thing about it, if you're a working man, you have the satisfaction of having done your job, and you sleep well, whether you eat little or much. But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. There is a severe evil which I've seen under the sun.

Rich is kept for their owner to his hurt. Do you see a common thread running through all of this? It's a waste of time to try to achieve and pile up things in this life, to try to get your dream to come true in this life. It's a vapor.

You've got to find something that lasts beyond the setting of the sun. That's the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes. He says, this says, rich is kept.

And this is the word for guarded. The guy gets them, and he does everything he can to keep them. He's got his 401K, and he's got his bonds and his stocks and his retirement plan, and he's doing everything he can to preserve it.

And he says, this is a severe evil. Those riches perish, and it says, through misfortune. I don't have time to go into great detail here, but the bottom line is, he says, when he begets a son, there's nothing in his hand.

As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came. So you see this man's life. He's born, comes out of his mother's womb.

He started out naked. He gets all of his stuff. He even begets a son, which is in the ancient Near East, a great thing.

And yet, it says that he is going to go just like he came. He's going to leave with nothing. But then it goes on to say, and he shall take nothing from his labor.

Well, this tells you he's going on beyond the grave. I mean, if the Old Testament view was that life ended at the grave, then, well, you might as well have eaten and drunken and been merry at the point of death. But this is saying, you know, he's going to go on past death.

And all of that that he strove for didn't come with him. He's just as naked as when he came. And he says, he can't carry it away in his hand.

Well, let me turn this tape over and we'll continue.