

01-09-30a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Psalm 19. Psalm 19. This is a well-known psalm.

It has passages. I don't know if I've ever mentioned this to anyone, but the last verse of this psalm is a part of my prayer before every Bible class when we pause to get ready to study at the beginning of each class. This Psalm 19 is always a part of my thoughts.

But this psalm is subtitled, The Perfect Revelation of the Lord in the New King James. It is addressed to the chief musician. It is a psalm of David.

Most of the first 50 psalms are by David. And it's a wonderful psalm. It says, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the earth.

In them He has set a tabernacle for the Son, which is like a bridegroom coming out of His chamber. And He rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end.

And there is nothing hidden from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins.

Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Encapsulated within the words of this great song of David are many of the principles that we find in the passage before us in Ecclesiastes chapter 6. You have the contrast between wisdom and worldly riches, between things that are desirable on this earth, things that are satisfying, that are pleasing. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous, and more to be desired than gold,

yea, than much fine gold, David says in verse 10. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Not only are they pleasant and valuable, but they are also useful for warning and correction and instruction. Through the understanding of God's laws, testimonies, statutes and commandments, which we think about and exercise faith toward, this is summed up in the phrase, the fear of the Lord. This is what enables us to claim God's grace for cleansing, for purification, even for the things that we don't know that we have done.

We're often guilty of things that we don't even recognize, and yet, as 1 John 1.9 tells us, that when we acknowledge the things that we do identify and understand, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So God honors the attitude of heart in acknowledging our faults and sins and cleanses us fully. Well, let's return to Ecclesiastes chapter 6. We want to move forward in our study here, and I've been impressed as much this week as ever with the depth of the material that Solomon has given us in this book.

In this chapter in particular, we find no better example. The section that we have already covered tells us that in the first six verses, we had the man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all that his soul desires. But God does not give him the ability to partake of it, to eat of it.

Instead, a foreigner consumes it, an alien consumes it. And Solomon says, this is havel. This is a terrible sickness.

And the reason it is a sickness, what do we know about sicknesses? They are often contagious. They are often incurable, especially in Solomon's day. They didn't have a lot of sophisticated medicine.

And something that spreads and is incurable is a malady that can run through the entire community. There can be sort of a fever that catches hold of people. We think of the gold rush, the 1849 rush to California where people saw the get-rich-quick opportunity and it spread and thousands of people pulled up stakes and went west.

You had the Alaska gold rush that Jack London wrote so much about. And even today, there will be a frenzy that attaches itself to people. Just watch when the lottery, the Powerball lottery starts getting up into the millions.

Even the Texas lottery, when it doesn't get taken week after week and pretty soon the amount is up there. And next thing you know, everybody is down there buying a lottery ticket hoping for the big piece of cheese. And this is nothing new.

There is no new thing under the sun. Men have been enticed by the prospect of great riches, especially great riches at minimal cost and trouble ever since they walked out of the garden. And so when he says to obtain these things and yet not have the power to enjoy it, this is a great

sickness because there are two paths to wealth.

One is to pursue the wealth directly. This is what we are talking about. This is what man typically does.

Run to the oil fields, run to the gold fields, run to the pyramid scheme, to the distributorship in some organization where if you get ten other people and they get ten people and those ten people get ten people, it will all come back to you. I remember in high school there was a deal going around before they outlawed chain letters where you would get a thing in the mail and they say, well, put a dollar in the envelope and mail it to the bottom name on the list and then wait six weeks or something and you will get all of these dollars in the mail from all these people. And it is just a pyramid thing sweeping right through.

That is the pyramid in its most elemental form. And to strive for wealth or security or anything else for that matter by going directly to it and saying this is my goal, this is my objective, I want health. And people do this with a lot of things.

Wealth stands in for a lot of the things that man pursues. We pursue security. We pursue good looks.

There are people who are so intent upon having a good presentation of their physical body before the world that they will spend all kinds of money on plastic surgery and lifting and tucking and removing this and adding to that. That is the goal. The goal is to look as good as you can possibly be made to look.

The best looks that money can buy are the goal. And this is a wealth that someone pursues. And in all of these different areas, some people strive for recognition in their chosen field of endeavor to be noticed, to be recognized, in some circles to be published, to receive a prize or to receive some form of recognition in some chosen field.

And you can think of small examples just within a circle of acquaintance. You can think of large examples in the realm of fame and fortune. But regardless of what it is, we have a natural tendency to pursue this wealth, this objective that we set for ourselves and we think will make us happy.

And we do not have along with it the ability to enjoy it. Because if you just make a goal out of wealth or beauty or success or notoriety or approbation, even when you achieve it, there is no accompanying capacity to enjoy it. This is why it has become a syndrome.

It is just a truism that people become rich and famous and then do not enjoy it. You look in Hollywood and you look in New York and other places where people have achieved and gotten everything that they want and they wind up asking themselves, is this all there is? And they do not have the ability to partake. And Solomon says, this is running riot in the human race.

It is a terrible sickness. How do you define a terrible sickness in the ancient world? It is one that spreads rapidly and for which there is no cure. And that is what Solomon says and that is just as true today.

There is not an antibiotic for this kind of desire. There is no inoculation or vaccination in the human realm to protect us from ambition, from yearning. You know this awful woman, this lesbian woman that gets up and sings this song.

It is called Constant Craving. I do not even know what the whole song is about. She dresses in black.

If I think for a minute, I will remember her name, but I do not really want to. Anyway, Constant Craving. People have a craving.

They have a desire that never seems to be fulfilled. And even when it is fulfilled, it is not fulfilled because beneath the desire for riches, approval, beauty, fame, approbation, recognition, whatever it might be, beneath that is a desire to be satisfied, for the soul to be filled. And that deepest need is sort of a God-shaped need and it is not going to be filled by any of these things that we think will fill it.

I have been struck and I have mentioned before that particularly being at Buckner and having seen up close the adoption area where people are wanting to establish their physical roots. They want to find out where they came from. The genealogy is a related thing where maybe you know who your parents are, but you want to trace it all the way back to the old country and beyond.

And people are looking for something. Adoptees who maybe never did know about their birth parents, they say, I want to find my birth parents, I want to find out why was I put up for adoption, what was my natural mother thinking, what were the circumstances, what were my genetics and all that. There is nothing wrong with wanting to find those things out for one reason or another, but there are people who make this a mission.

It is like, if I don't find this out, my life is not worth living. If I cannot, I am missing something. I am like a one-armed man going through life and this is my missing arm and I have just got to have this or I will never be happy.

And it is a void that they think, finding out their roots, their ancestry, or their kindred and do I have any siblings and one thing or another, that this is going to somehow fill this void. And Solomon says, this is a sickness that pervades the human race, looking for this thing that you are going to get hold of and seize and bring into yourself. And it is pictured as wealth.

But it can be anything that people pursue. So he says that this is a terrible sickness because a man can prosper in so many ways. He is not just rich with gold and silver.

He is rich with family. He is rich in terms of length of life. He is going to live many years so that the days of his years are many.

But his nephesh, his soul, is not filled with goodness. And then we have this phrase about, indeed, he has no burial. And this is kind of an awkward phrase even in the Hebrew.

People have tried to figure out. We have talked about it in terms of, if this is referring to the rich man who lived a long life and so on, but it says, indeed, he has no burial, this indicates that his soul was not filled with goodness and this is sort of parallel to it. There is not a genuine lasting memorial.

There are some who think that this phrase actually attaches to what follows, that his soul is not satisfied with goodness and then that we are talking about the stillborn child. Indeed, even if it has no burial, I say a stillborn child is better than he. That is possible in the Hebrew.

In either case, the sense is clear. You can achieve a lot and yet if your soul is not filled with goodness, you are no better off than someone who never spent an actual conscious day of human life. Because without the goodness in your soul, without something that transcends the rising and setting of the sun, you are actually worse off because you had the opportunity and you wasted it.

It is one thing to have never had an opportunity. It is something else to have had it and squandered it. Someone who never had an opportunity hasn't wasted anything.

They haven't abused grace. Someone who has been offered grace and refused it is in worse shape. And that is the sense here.

The stillborn, the miscarried infant comes like vapor. If you have ever been near a situation where there was a miscarriage or a stillborn child, what an awful experience. There has been so much anticipation, so much emotional investment in awaiting the arrival of a child.

Plans are made. There is great expectation. And then something unexpected happens and the child is just not there.

And it is an awful experience to go through. There is just a tremendous sense of grief. Any loss of a child, it is just an almost unfathomable level of grief.

And it is no exception in a case like this. But the arrival, the appearance of this stillborn infant is so brief. It comes, it is determined that it is not alive and it is quickly taken away.

You can't keep it. You can't hang on to it. There is no time that you can really spend because it is not alive.

And there will be a glance, there will be a look, there is incredible sorrow and then the body is

carried away and people have to pick up the pieces and go forward. And it is so traumatic. And your heart goes out to anyone that ever goes through this.

And you would think, well, here is Solomon teaching and he brings up this awful circumstance. It is a traumatic thing to even think about, much less go through. But Solomon brings it up in this context.

Why would he do that? Why would he put us through this? He is trying to get our attention. He says, look, there is a terrible sickness that pervades the human race and it is the pursuit of things that even when you gain them, they don't satisfy because there is no filling of the soul with good. And he says, let me shock you a little bit.

I will tell you what it is like. It is like a stillborn child. In fact, a stillborn child is better off than someone that does this.

He comes like a vapor, just here and gone. You want to talk about something transient and impermanent, he is just hardly even here. Just a glance and it is gone.

Departs in darkness and his name is covered with darkness. People often plan ahead. In Israel, they usually name the child at the time, the circumstances, you know, Ben-Oni.

The names were often given. You remember Rachel and Leah when they had all of their sons and how the names came about. They were reflective of the circumstances at the moment.

But if you have been thinking about and planning for this child and you have thought up a name and then the child is stillborn, well, that name now becomes a source of pain because it reminds you of everything that could have been that is not. And so nobody wants to mention that name anymore. Very seldom, I have heard of this happening, but it is very seldom where someone will get pregnant and have another child and use the same name.

That name usually departs with the lost child. And just to even try to think about that is too painful. And so the name, the stillborn infant, comes and goes like a vapor.

It is a dark time. It comes in darkness. It doesn't ever see the sun.

It is a dark time for the parents. The name that was to have been attached to that child goes along with them. The name is covered in darkness.

And Solomon says in verse 5, though it has not seen the sun or known anything, it has more rest than that man. And it is very powerful in Hebrew. It says this has more rest than that.

He says this whole situation, there is more comfort, not just in the stillborn child. The impression here is that, well, the stillborn child is experiencing some form of rest. It just says, the demonstrative pronouns in Hebrew just say there is more rest in this than that.

There is more rest and comfort in going through the trauma of a miscarriage or a stillborn child than there is for the man who spends his life accumulating things and is not given the power to enjoy them. And it is a very strong statement in Hebrew. It is a grievous sickness.

It requires sort of a grievous answer. It requires something strong to awaken us to it, to warn us about it. And so Solomon uses this.

Anybody who communicates draws on their experience or draws on what they know of the Word of God to come up with illustrations or comparisons to try to get a point across. And there are things that you just don't choose to bring up by way of illustration because they can be painful to people. There might be people who have experienced various things and you think, well, I don't want to drag that up.

That's a shocking thing. It's a painful thing. It's an awkward thing.

It's embarrassing. Let's find an illustration somewhere else. But Solomon takes this very painful thing.

And remember in the ancient world it was far more common than it is today. They didn't have scientific prenatal care and sonograms and all of the things. Our infant mortality rate is a fraction of what it has been all the way through history up to just the last 50 years.

It was an exception to find a family that had not lost a child all the way up until this most recent generation. And so everyone in Solomon's audience has either experienced this themselves or has been close to someone. You can count on it.

Look at the biblical history. There were so many who lost a child. The woman associated with Elijah the prophet.

There were many who would lose a child in infancy. It was just very common. So Solomon uses this comparison to shock us into thinking about am I following the pattern of the rich man? Am I setting my sights on things, defining what fulfillment and happiness is and making that my goal and I'm going to arrive there without the ability to appreciate and enjoy because there's something missing.

And we're going to go forward and see what that something is. He refers to it here as the soul filled with goodness. It's not so much satisfied with goodness as filled with goodness.

If we arrive at whatever we are shooting for with a soul filled with goodness, we're not going to be in this situation. This man, the way we know that he has no power to partake of what he's been given, it's because his soul is not filled with goodness. And this is a compressed, almost elliptical way of telling us that the things that we pursue, the process of gaining them has to be a process that fills our soul with goodness.

It's not what we are shooting for so much as how we shoot for it. It's not the destination we're trying to arrive at so much as what is the process by which we hope to get there. For example, you think of financial security.

Why would we make a goal out of wealth, out of having no monetary worries? Well, there are reasons why. The Bible says, Owe no man anything. We want to provide for our families.

We want to be able to help others. We want to have the ability to do things with those resources that further the plan of God. If that's our goal, then as we pursue the acquisition of these material resources, our soul is going to be filled with good because each step along the way toward that goal is going to be taken by through His righteousness, faith that fills the soul with goodness.

If we just look at the prize, if we just look at the goal, and we say, well, I'm going to get to that goal and then I'll be able to do all of these wonderful things for God or whatever, and we have sort of a superficial rationale for it, but the steps that we take to arrive at that goal don't reflect faith and don't reflect a consistent viewpoint. We do this, and it's a hard thing even to talk about. It's a hard thing to define.

But it happens all the time for believers because we say, this goal that I have is good. It is good and it will be good because if I have plenty of money, just think, I can give to the church, I can do this, that, and the other. This is our surface rationale.

But underneath all of this, what we really have is an insecurity or what we really have is a desire to be able to do lots of things with that money, and we're sort of putting a veneer on the top and saying, well, just think, if I had this money, what I could do for God, and I would be sure and put some in the offering plate, and I could help people. But lurking down beneath the surface is, boy, what made me think of this in the first place is I'm in a tight spot here. I can't do what I want to do with money, and let me go to God and I'll put a good face on this and say I want money.

And we fool ourselves. We convince ourselves that, well, what I really want to do is be a great believer with my money, and I want to be one of those. I'll support the missionaries.

I'll do this, that, and the other with my money. But what prompted us to get into the whole discussion about money to begin with? Well, something broke and we couldn't replace it. Something died and we couldn't fix it.

We are going to have to wait. We're going to have to do without. We say, boy, you know, this not having money deal is a real pain.

And man, if I just had some money... And we didn't look around and say, oh, look, here's a missionary that doesn't have enough. Gosh, I wish I had money to give that missionary. And we never thought about not having money before until we saw the missionary.

It usually comes from some other source. And then we fool ourselves and unwittingly try to fool

God and say, well, you know, Lord, if I had all these resources, oh, the things I could do. Lord, you know, if I was independently wealthy, I could spend all my time studying the Word of God and I wouldn't have to go down and waste all my time at a job, you know, just putting my nose to the grindstone.

But, you know, there's a part of you that says, well, that grindstone's not that pleasant anyway. And we have a hard time filtering out our mixed motives. But what Solomon says here is that you can arrive at that place by some means and your soul is not filled with good and there's no rest.

There's no permanent value attached to it. You can't partake of it and there's no peace. There's no rest associated with that thing.

What you thought it was going to do, it doesn't really do anyway. That hidden motive, the subterranean machinations in our soul, still aren't satisfied even when we achieve that thing. That's why so many rich people auger themselves into the ground with chemicals.

They keep showing... Entertainment Tonight comes on in the evening sometimes and they start talking about, oh, here's the little child star of Eight is Enough or one of these other shows that I never watched anyway and they say, well, here he is now, he's all grown up and he's been through rehab and here the mother on the show was on drugs and the brother was on drugs and the little guy grew up and he's on drugs and everybody's on drugs. What's the matter with these people? They're living this big American dream of becoming a movie star and being famous, having all kinds of residuals and royalties coming in. Well, you know, watch and learn.

Even if a man, verse 6, lives a thousand years twice but has not seen goodness, his soul is not filled with good, he might as well... The stillborn is better off than him. Whatever we pursue, even if it's just, I want to check everything off my list, I've got a to-do list for this day or this week or this month and that's my goal. A lot of us feel like a wealthy man at the end of a busy day.

We had six things to do, we got five of them done, the sixth one we can knock out in pretty short order and we have a sense of accomplishment, we have a sense of fulfillment. We say, ah, there you go, now see, that was a day well spent. Look, I can see the changes.

And yet, if our soul is not filled with goodness in the process, we don't really have the ability to partake of that. I learned this lesson when I was a small child going through the Sears Christmas catalog every year. You know, they mail that thing out in October so it was usually there by Halloween and here's all of the neat new battery operated toys and gizmos and that's what always got me was the things that ran on batteries, little helicopters and something you could do something with.

It moved, it lit up, erector sets and things like that and I would pine and grieve and think, you know, my life is not worth living unless I can have one of these things. And Christmas would come and sometimes I would get those things and you know how it is, Christmas morning, you

unwrap it, oh, here it is, I've been waiting for this for weeks and weeks and you know, my life has not been worth living until I got this thing and here it is. And so you take it out, you play with it, you play with it and you know, a few days go by, pretty soon, you know, life goes on and it's not the center and focus and you never return to that thing with the same initial enthusiasm as when you unwrapped it or when you anticipated it.

It doesn't provide the fulfillment on an ongoing basis that you shot. You can have momentary satisfaction from it but pretty soon, you're looking in the next year's Christmas catalog and you say, well, you know, I got the helicopter last year but what I really want is the super deluxe robot that shoots things out of its arm. So, you know, that's on a small scale the same thing that happens to us all.

And Solomon is saying, if you want to think about the difference between temporary and permanent, if you want to think about the difference between what is lost at death and what you take with you beyond death, look at what's in your soul. If your soul is not being filled with goodness, if you cannot pursue this thing with steps that fill your soul with goodness, even if you achieve it, you're not going to arrive with any ability to eat of it. It's going to be like King Midas trying to reach for food and have it turn to gold before he can take a mouthful.

Well, that brings us to the section that we begin this morning. Of course, the end of verse 6, do not all go to one place. And the word translated go here is halak.

And that's an important thing to keep in mind because we're going to be seeing a connection back to this in the next section. Even if the man lives a thousand years twice but has not seen goodness, the stillborn child has more rest. The people involved with the stillborn child experience, there's more rest in that than there is in this man who acquired all these things and lived a long, long time and never could.

In fact, the longer he lives, the less satisfied he's going to be. Then this odd little statement at the end of verse 6, do not all go to one place. And without goodness in the soul, you're going to arrive in the same place as the miscarriage, the same place as the stillborn child.

Then in verse 7, we'll read this in the New King James for this morning. It says, all the labor of man is for his mouth and yet the soul is not satisfied. And you might amend that.

This is another instance of the verb that means to be filled. All the labor of man is for his mouth and yet the soul is not filled. And I think it throws us off a little bit to talk about satisfaction because there are people who are satisfied.

There are people who are satisfied to pursue fame. There are people in Hollywood who are snorting coke even as we speak and are just blissfully continuing down that road. They don't sit and pine.

Even if they feel a dissatisfaction, it doesn't motivate them to change. They are as satisfied as they're ever going to be. And they're not dissatisfied enough to want to make a change, to look for truth elsewhere.

This is not so much satisfaction as it is the word that means to be filled. You can see the connotation of satisfaction. If you're full, you're sated.

You've had enough. I am satisfied. It's a very satisfying meal or satisfying cup of coffee, whatever.

But the root meaning here is the man is working. This is the verb *amal*, which means to labor. And all of this work of man, there's no definite article here, so it's all man, mankind in general, Adam.

All man's work is for his mouth. He's shoveling it in, shoveling it in, shoveling it in into his mouth, but his soul is not filling up. There's a difference in striving to put things into your soul and striving to put things into your mouth to satisfy your appetite, to feed your craving.

So this falls right in line with what we've seen up above, doesn't it? Mankind, this terrible sickness that we've got, is to constantly be putting stuff in our mouth, but we're not filling up our soul. Verse 8, For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Well, without some work, this translation kind of wanders us off into circles. It seems strange. It makes sense all the way up through verse 7, but then what more has the wise man than the fool? Well, if we're filling up our soul with wisdom, then this doesn't seem to make any sense.

What does the poor man have who knows how to walk before the living? What does it mean to walk before the living? Why is it only the poor man can do that? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire? Doesn't sound to me like either one of those is too good. You know, your window shopping, it just gets very confusing. So we want to do a little bit of work from the Hebrew text here and see if we can make a little bit more sense out of it.

So let's begin in verse 7. All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied. This is not too bad if we change satisfied to filled. All man's work is for his mouth.

Well, right away, we know that this is a subset of human effort. There are people who are motivated by something other than their appetites, than their cravings. So there's been a lot of debate about what does the word *all* mean in Scripture.

Since one died for all, then all have died, and you get into Romans, and in Christ shall all be made alive, and is all, all, or is all some? Well, you have to look at the context. You have to

decide. Somebody calls up on the phone, your family, three of the four of you are sick, and somebody calls up and says, well, how are you all doing? Oh, well, we're all sick.

Well, in subsequent conversation, you find out that three of the four are sick. But you can look around in a room and say, I'm tired of all of you. But you can pick out individuals and say, well, not that one, not that one.

All means the category. Well, the category of work that is done for the mouth does not fill the soul. When it says all man's work, it doesn't mean that there is not a work you can do as a man that isn't just for the mouth and not for the soul.

It means that the work that is done, this is what our context tells us, all means all work that is done to satisfy the appetite. If you're doing your work because you're trying to achieve your own personal satisfaction, you've got an appetite in that area, you've got a desire in that area, and I want that, I'm going to go after it, I'm going to get it. I need that for some reason.

If that's why you're doing it, this is the kind of work that does not fill the soul. There is work that does fill the soul, the work we're doing right now. If we're susceptible to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, if we're here because we want to understand and assimilate the truth of God and be transformed by it, this is a work and it's a good work and it is filling to the soul.

But Solomon makes sort of a broad statement here. All man's work is for his mouth and yet the soul is not filled. This is man at large.

This is man under the sun. This is the temporal life, not lived with an eye on eternity. So then in verse 80 says, New King James says, For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have who knows how to walk before the living? Well, the word that they translate, what more, is a word that means what is left over.

What is left over to the wise more than the fool. And we've seen before that the wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool can't see in the dark and he doesn't know what he's stumbling over. And there is a kind of human wisdom or temporal wisdom, a skill, chakma, which is the word here, chakam, is wisdom in the sense of a skill.

This means you are adept at something. You can do something well. There are people who know how to get their finances in order.

They've got their 401K and they've got their CDs and they've got their stock portfolio and they've diversified and they've got some here and some there. They're really good at establishing and maintaining some financial security and planning for the future in that regard. And don't get me wrong, that's a great thing.

I wish I had more wisdom in that area than I do. But that skill, or someone else might be skillful politically or skillful in making themselves visible. When they were in the class, they wound up

floating up and being a class officer.

They were a midshipman and they became a striper. I was reading my alumni magazine that came yesterday. They're looking for people to be on the alumni board of trustees and here's some guy in the class of 81 or 86 or something and he's Mr. So and So.

He didn't go on to have a military career or retire, but he's notable in his class. And when the time comes to choose someone to represent that group, he sort of stands out. He's got skill.

He's got wisdom in an area where he's notable. He's noted. He's admired.

He's visible to others and they say, here's a guy we can count on to do stuff for us. What Solomon says is, let's say you get achievement in that area. You're one of the ones that stands out in your field.

The farmer outstanding in his field. What's left over to you when the sun sets? Let's say you did become notable. You made the who's who in your field.

What is left over to the ha-ham, to the wise, more than the ha-seel, the fool? That's the first statement. What, and literally if I give you a word for word translation, what for the afflicted knowing to walk conspicuously before the living? And since this is a parallel to the first phrase in verse eight, it's sort of elliptical. What is left over for the afflicted knowing to walk conspicuously before the living? And before, when you say before, it's usually paneh.

It's usually before the face of. Moses stood before Pharaoh. It's before the face of is the literal translation.

This is not that word. This is a different word. And this word really emphasizes the fact that this is in the sight of someone in a conspicuous way.

This is a conspicuous thing in your vision. It really stands out. So here are, and this word for poor, again, is not so much poor in the sense of not having money as downtrodden or afflicted goes.

This means that you've got unjust suffering going on. So here you have the afflicted, those who are suffering unjustly through no fault of their own. There was a fire that totally burnt them out.

There was some natural disaster. The hailstorm wiped out all their crops and left them bankrupt. And they are an object of pity.

They're good grounds for charity. They're a charity case. And possibly through no fault of their own.

They're afflicted. They got put in this position. They got caught in the cracks in a war or whatever.

So here's the afflicted. And they know how to walk conspicuously before the living. So here's

someone who's afflicted, but they're going to put themselves out there.

They're not suffering in silence. They're not hiding under the stairwell. They get out there and make their case.

Or someone else is making the case for them. You look at the people in the New York City bombing and the families of the victims and the families of the firefighters and so forth. Here's people who, through no fault of their own, suddenly find themselves in dire straits.

The breadwinner and provider and the husband and father is gone. And they need relief. And they are put out before us in a conspicuous way.

There's all kinds of charitable giving. Don't get me wrong. It's a great thing.

But it's an illustration of what's being spoken of here. What is left over to the skillful as over against the fool? What's left over to the ones who, even though they're afflicted, even though they come up short through no fault of their own, know how to put themselves out in front of all the living. Everybody who's out there who's making a living, who's got the ability to help them.

If they get out there and achieve, we're talking about filling needs, aren't we? Whether it's perceived to be an ambition that's unnecessary or whether it's perceived to be a genuine need. You've got a genuine, legitimate lack because you're afflicted, because you have suffered a loss. If you go out and get that need filled, what is left over when the sun sets? What advantage is there? And we think, well, it's always good to be charitable.

There's always going to be some intrinsic good involved in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and visiting the sick and afflicted and giving them help. Solomon says, hey, here's the afflicted who know how to walk before the living. They know how to get their cause out there and get relief.

They know how to glean from the corners of the field. They know how to... Ruth caught the eye of Boaz because she was out there gleaning the corners of the fields as the law provided. But what's left over when that charity is accomplished? What's left over when the wise man uses his wisdom to advance? This is Solomon's question.

This is what we should ask ourselves even when it's legitimate. Even when you say, I've got to accomplish this goal. It's necessary.

Maybe it's not a craving. It's not an illegitimate desire. Maybe it's a legitimate desire.

You're afflicted. You have a lack and you're trying to fill it. This is what the language in the Hebrew here is saying.

Whether it's something you take on as an addition to what you already have or whether you've

got a lack that you're trying to fill. You're going out there and you're shoveling into the lack. Well, what's left over? What do you end up with when all is said and done? Let's say you fill that need.

Let's say you achieve that goal. What's going to be left over? This is a question we can ask ourselves about our daily endeavors. We say, well, this is a legitimate endeavor.

This is exactly a part of my responsibility. Or we have those other areas where we say, I really, this is something I want to do. I want to advance.

I want to go beyond the treadmill. I want to do this, that and the other. Either way, we have to ask ourselves the question, what's going to be left over in the pursuit of these things when the sun sets? This was a novel question in the Old Testament day.

This wasn't a question that the law of Moses posed. But it's a question that Solomon poses. He's pushing the envelope.

He's bumping against the glass ceiling of the Old Testament age. And he's come to realize with the great wisdom that God gave him, you know, it isn't just about this life. What's going to be left over when this life is done? We need to measure everything we do by that standard.

Everything. Even when it's a legitimate need to accomplish. Even when it's a goal, a worthy desire.

Nothing wrong with being rich. Nothing wrong with achieving in a lot of different areas. But why do we do what we do? Is it filling our soul with good? Is there going to be anything left over that's going to be impressive when God does the evaluating? That's the question to ask.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to address verse 9, which is really going to link us into the next section and show us where we're going. Let's pause here and take our break.