

01-09-30b Ecclesiastes

We're ready to resume our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 6. And we find ourselves in a section where the material is very dense, in the sense that a lot is being said with a few words. And that is in fact the case in much of this book. And I think one of the reasons that we've historically had a hard time with this particular book is that unless you're listening to the theme that Solomon is addressing, it's easy to just take statements at face value and not tie them back to what's being said.

That probably makes no sense, but it will when we go forward here a little bit. I'll illustrate what I'm talking about. We have just seen verse 8, what more or what is left over to the wise man more than the fool? What is there for the afflicted, knowing to walk conspicuously before the living? And you'll notice, you remember in the first lesson I said when we were reviewing the previous section we covered up in verse 6 to pay attention to the last phrase of verse 6. Even if the rich man who has all of these things but doesn't have the ability to partake of them, to really enjoy them, he doesn't have capacity, even if he lives a thousand years twice but has not seen goodness, has not seen good, tov, then actually the stillborn child is better off because he didn't have an opportunity and waste it.

But he never had the opportunity to begin with. Then it ends with this kind of odd conclusion. Do not all go to one place.

And the verb there for go is halak. Halak is a versatile word. It often means literally to walk, to put one foot in front of the other.

It can mean to travel or to go. We saw this in chapter 1 with the circuit of the wind and the circuit of the waters. Halak was used for the wind and used for the waters, you may recall.

And so you have some choices when halak is used. And you can also tie things together by repeating the same word, using the same verb in the immediate context often will hark you back to the last time you used that verb. So we have this reminder that both the stillborn child and the rich man do not all go to one place.

Do they not all halak to one place? And what is that one place? That's outside of this world. This world is over and done with and they're not in it anymore. The stillborn child, the miscarriage, never was in it and has, in a sense, arrived at the destination without ever coming to the beginning point.

But they halak to the same place. Once the rich man is dead, he and the child are both outside of the rising and setting of the sun, if you will. It reminds us of David after the death of the child that he fathered with Bathsheba.

And when they told him the child had died, he had been grieving and mourning and prostrating

himself for days and not eating any food. And then once they told him the child was dead, he cleaned up and dressed himself. And they said, well, we don't understand.

Usually at the point of death is when people begin the mourning process and you're ending your mourning at the point of the death of the child. And he says, well, he understood that God had made his decision and there was no point in continuing to appeal to God. He said, he cannot return to me, but I can go to him.

And I haven't looked, but I suspect that *halak* is used there as well. And the idea being, I will go forward and be gone from this life just as that child is. People have tried to make more out of that verse than what's there, trying to say, well, David believed in heaven and he's saying the child is in heaven, it's infant salvation, and I'm going to die and go to be with him in heaven.

That isn't what it's saying at all. He just says, he cannot return to me, but I will go to that same place. He's exited this life.

One day I will exit this life and we'll both be gone. That's all that David was saying. And he's saying that is his explanation for not continuing to mourn.

There's no point in wasting any more time mourning or to waste any time in mourning. Not that it was wasted beforehand, but he's got to move on. Well, same thing here.

Do not all go to one place. And then he continues and he says, all of this labor, and we're still in the context of the rich man who has acquired these things, we can't partake. And he says, all the labor of man, you notice is as in italics there, because all the labor of man for his mouth.

With this category of labor, when you're just doing it because you want to do it, you think you need to do it, and there's nothing outside affecting your thinking, your soul is not filled. If there isn't something of the divine, if there isn't something for a believer in terms of recognition and perspective on God's plan and God's purpose, then you're just spinning your wheels. You are that actor.

I've quoted you that thing from Shakespeare about strutting and fretting the hour upon the stage and all the sound and fury. Let me just give that to you again. That's from *Macbeth*.

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle, life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

This Shakespeare summed up in English what Solomon is saying here in Hebrew, which is you can be going through all these histrionics and you're not going to have anything left over. What is left over to the wise more than the fool? What's going to be left over to the one who has a

legitimate beef, who is walking conspicuously before the living saying, look, I'm afflicted. Y'all have got to help me out here and is seeking to have their needs met in that way.

He says there's nothing going to be left over. So then we resume now in verse 9 where he says, better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Well, literally here it says better, tov. Tov is again a versatile word. It means good normally.

If you have it in conjunction with some prepositions, if you have the word tov followed by one thing and then you have the preposition maim, a prefix maim on something else, then it's saying this thing is good from this thing, literally, which comes to mean this is better than that. And one of the interesting things is that when we saw the translations where they were saying there is nothing better for man than to do this, we did not have that construction. And the whole better than idea sort of leaked out by osmosis from passages like this where it's legitimate to translate tov as better.

This is a place where the construction dictates that you translate tov as better. Those others, they just made up a rule for that occasion because they couldn't figure out what it was saying. So here it does mean better is the sight of the eyes.

And this word means what the eyes see. It's the vision, it's the perspective or the vista that is presented to the eyes. Better the thing which is seen by the eyes, the vision of the eyes, from, and we would render this in English, than, better the vision of the eyes than the halak of the soul, the walking, the traveling, the going of the soul.

Well, where is the last place we had halak? It was in verse 8. The poor man who knows how to walk before the living, who knows how to walk conspicuously. Well, were we talking about literal walking there? Are we talking about putting his case out before these who are looking on? When you walk conspicuously in front of someone, they're looking at you and you're doing the walking. You're the afflicted, you've got the cause, you've got the need, you have the worthy charity or you have the legitimate need for someone to pay attention and help you out.

Well, there's got to be a second party. It doesn't do any good to walk conspicuously if nobody's looking. This is why I always find it entertaining.

On the news, they will say, oh, well, there were protests down at the Dallas City Courthouse today because teachers are not getting fair treatment or some such. This happened last spring. And I watched it on the news and you see all of these people milling around the front of the courthouse, steps and all.

Well, I had dropped off the Volkswagen at the repair place on that day and it's close enough to work that I can walk there and back. I can halak to my office from the Volkswagen shop. And the

Dallas courthouse is on the way.

And I had seen this confabulation of people up in arms over teachers' pay or teachers' benefits or something when I walked by. And I saw the TV camera sitting up. And when I walked by, you've got this little thinly scattered rabble, a couple of people with signs saying, you know, honk if you're for the teachers.

And a car would honk as they went by. But there was just a double handful of people out there. When I watched the news that evening, the way the camera angles are, you see this sea of heads and it looks like, oh, there's this big throng of people there, when in fact there was maybe 20 or 25.

It looked like there were just hundreds the way they shot it. They didn't show all the empty space and all the places where people weren't. So, you know, in being presented in the media that way, it's kind of like you know how to walk before the sight of all the people who are all the living to see your plight and have pity on you and do something about it.

Well, so this is how to present yourself before people. It's not walking in the literal sense of one foot in front of another, right? And the use of halak that we had before that up in verse 6 is do not all go to one place. This is go in the sense of doesn't everyone's life ultimately end is the idea.

This is the travel through life. So when it says better is the vision of the eyes than the halak of the soul, what sort of a use are we talking about here? Are we saying... because we've had several different uses of sight. Remember up in verse... talking about the miscarried, the stillborn child in verse 4. It comes in havel.

It comes in vapor. It departs in darkness. Its name is covered in darkness.

Verse 5, though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest in it than that. There's more rest for people in a situation of a stillborn child than there is for this rich man who doesn't have capacity even if he lives a thousand years twice. So my point is Solomon, and again this is one of the manifestations of the wisdom that God gave him.

There's a lot of bandwidth here. There's a lot of information in a very few verses. The idea that you see things in life or you don't see things in life.

The stillborn child doesn't see the sun, doesn't even get the chance to make any decisions in life where the rich man does. And then the walking, the going to one place. You have both of these ideas summed up now down in verse 9. Better is the sight of the eyes than the traveling of the soul.

It says wandering of desire, but the word here is nephesh, which is soul. Better the vision of the eyes than the traveling of the soul. Well, this has two connotations in this context because in the immediate context of verse 8, the preceding verse, you have people looking on at the afflicted.

You have the afflicted walking or parading themselves before all living, advertising their cause. This word means they're conspicuous. They've made an issue of themselves in the sight of all the living.

So do you want to be the afflicted walking back and forth saying, here's my cause, fill my need? Or do you want to be the one that's looking on? You're the person to whom they are appealing. And so in one sense, this says better to be the one looking on. It's better to be the one looking than the one walking.

Better the vision of the eyes than the walking of the soul. Now unfortunately, when they translate this into English, you look at the versions and translations and interpretations of this, what they say is, well, it's better to be able to look upon things and actually have them than to let your imagination fantasize and run off on things that you can't have. It'll just make you unhappy having your soul wander around looking for things.

But there's a perfectly good word for wander and this isn't it. Halak means you're going to a destination. That's how it's been used throughout this book.

Whether you're going to the destination of physical death, whether you're going to the destination you're wanting to advertise your cause in front of all living because you're afflicted. So the traveling of the soul, this is what happened to the stillborn child up here. Remember the man that begot a hundred children lived many years, the days of his years are many, but his nefesh is not filled with goodness.

All man's work is for his mouth, verse 7, and yet the nefesh is not filled. So what does it mean then when we get down to verse 9 and it says better the vision of the eyes than the walking, traveling, going of the soul? Well, the traveling of the soul, this is the point of physical death. Your soul leaves.

Your soul goes away. The traveling of the soul is when it is not filled. If your soul is filled, then it doesn't have to go.

This is the idea behind the English translations is that your soul is wandering around because it's not satisfied and so it's halak. But you go all the way back to chapter 1 where it talked about the wind, halaks, and then returns to its place. The water, halaks, it goes and travels and then it returns to its place.

And so what is the question here in verse 8? What is left over to someone who can see and has his eyes in his head versus the fool that stumbles in the darkness? You know, that was earlier in the book. What is left over for the afflicted who knows how to walk conspicuously in the sight of the living? Better the vision of the eyes than the going of the soul. What does that mean? Well, it's difficult.

You can look in commentaries, you can look in translations and people just kind of want to gloss over this part and get to the next part. What I would like to suggest to you is Solomon is saying if you have the vision of the eyes, you're still under the sun. You're still able to see.

You're part of all living up here in verse 8 because the afflicted are walking back and forth in the sight of the living. So if you're one of those that has the vision of the eyes, if you're able to see the afflicted, if you're able to see good in your labor, we've had that phrase several times, the man who works and sees good in his labor. You've still got potential.

You're still here. Your sun has not set. You're not the stillborn child.

You're not the rich man that has died. You're still here. Better the vision of the eyes than the traveling of the soul, the walking of the soul.

It's better to be the person looking than to be the person walking. You've got eyes and you've got soul here in this comparison. So he concludes this verse by saying this also is Havel and feeding on the wind or chasing the wind, depending on how you want to understand that verb.

We've established, I think, that it's feeding on the wind. Better the vision of the eyes than the traveling of the soul. This is vapor and feeding on wind.

So what does this actually say? We're going to see a passage in the not-too-distant future where it says better a living dog than a dead lion. Remember that from Ecclesiastes? It's better to be a living dog than a dead lion. And that's sort of a human viewpoint thing.

Well, I'd rather be a coward and live than be brave and die. And there are people who look at a situation and come up with a conventional piece of human wisdom. And it's always better to be alive than to be dead.

People figure that there's nothing worth losing your life over. There's nothing worth dying for. That's why a lot of people are conscientious objectors and run to Canada.

Better the vision of the eyes than the walking of the soul. And if your soul walks, what does that mean? It means you're dead. This is pretty much a reference to physical death.

That's how it was used up above for the picture of departing this life. So better the vision of the eyes than the traveling of the soul. This statement is Havel and feeding on wind.

It's not necessarily better to be alive. It's the very same thing he said up above. Some people would say, well, it's better to be the rich man and be looking at your riches and be pursuing things than to be a stillborn child who can't see anything under the sun.

It's better to see than to be dead. It's better to be alive than to be dead. Solomon says this statement is vapor.

This statement is feeding on wind. Because he just got through saying there's more rest in the case of a stillborn miscarried child than there is for the man who has accumulated these things, who is able to see under the sun and doesn't have capacity to enjoy it. What does this tell us? It is worse to be here and fail the grace of God than to have never been here at all.

And to say anything different is vapor and feeding on wind. If you say, well, at least I was alive. Not necessarily.

If you achieve a lot of things in this life and you haven't filled your soul with good, to say that, well, at least I lived is a havel statement. It's feeding on wind. You're giving yourself an empty truth that has no substance.

It is not true that the vision of the eyes is better than the walking of the soul to continue to see and continue to live. There are things worth dying for. That's not what this passage is teaching, but we know that that's true.

That's why Jesus died on the cross. There was something worth dying for. That's why the apostles were martyred, in many cases, for their faith.

Because there are things more important than continuing to see things under the sun. And there are people whose nephesh has walked out of this life because they believed in something that was greater than themselves. It depends on what that something is.

We had suicide bombers who left this life because they believed in something greater than themselves. The merit of faith is in the object. But to make sense out of this requires us to pay attention to the context.

How did this chapter begin? You can think you've got everything and you really have nothing. It would have been better to have not been here than to have been here and accumulated what you accumulated, not ever have your soul filled with good. The Bible says, it would have been better for that man had he never been born.

And to say different, to say that, well, at least being around to see with the eyes is better than dying, is vapor. It's not true. Now, you might be kind of 50-50 on this, like, well, maybe yes, maybe no.

But now look at verse 10. Verse 10 of the New King James says, Whatever one is, he has been named already, for it is known that he is man, and he cannot contend with him who is mightier than he. The syntax here is open to either being he or it.

It can either be masculine or it can be neuter. And if you look at the New American Standard, I think they say it has been named already rather than he. And the way it's constructed, you cannot distinguish between the two.

But let me give you a translation of this that's as literal as I can make it. That which is was long ago called by its name. That which is was long ago called by its name.

And it is known that he himself is Adam. He himself is man. That which is was long ago called by its name.

And it is known that he himself is man. Or Adam. In verse 10 here, Adam has no definite article in the same way that we saw verse 7 when it said, All the labor of man is for his mouth.

All man's work is for his mouth. This was Adam. And when you have Adam without the definite article, it tends to imply that we're talking about the race, the human race.

What's that famous saying? Something or other. Thy name is woman. Vanity.

Thy name is woman. Or some such thing. Anyway, where you put the thing for a whole category.

And that's what's happening here. That which is, and that's the status quo, this human race that has got this terrible sickness of expending all of its efforts in pursuit of things that it cannot enjoy and can't take out of this life. That which is was long ago called by its name.

And it is known that he himself is man. Or Adam. And the final phrase here, And he is not able to judge with the one mightier than he.

This contend you may recognize when we went through Genesis chapter 6. My spirit will not strive with man forever, for that also he is flesh. And the verb there does not mean to strive. And it does not mean to contend.

It means to judge. It is the Hebrew verb din. D-I-N This is the verb from which the noun Dan comes from.

And remember Dan is judge. And din has the idea of to administrate, to adjudicate, to determine the rightness of a cause, to determine the value or the merit of someone's argument, to determine what good or ill should be assigned to someone. That's what a judge does.

Those who sit and judge in the gates of the city, that's what they do. They hear the merits of the case. They assign blame.

They assign credit. They decide the merit of the case. So that which is was long ago called by its name, and it is known that he himself is man.

The name that was called long ago is Adam. This is harking all the way back to the garden. God called man Adam.

And he is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. Our ability to judge does not compare to the one mightier. Who is mightier than man? Well, this is a reference to God.

Who is it that called the name Adam into being? It was God. This is an oblique but clear reference to God. That which is was long ago called by its name.

God named the human race Adam. It is known that he himself is man, and he, man, is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. If you call someone's name, remember we just had the example of the man who begets a son, who may beget a hundred sons.

Well, he has the privilege of naming those sons. He or his wife gets to assign the name to the sons. And in the ancient Near East, the father is always greater than the son.

Remember the conundrum that Jesus presented to the people who were trying to confound him. He said, how can David say to his son, the Lord said to my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool. If he is his son, how is he then his Lord? It didn't make any sense that the son could be greater than the father.

Because in the Hebrew mind, the father is always greater than the son. And that was the substance of Jesus' riddle to the Pharisees. Well, the same thing here.

That which is, this human race, with all of its problems, was long ago called by its name, Adam. Who called it that name? God. This tells you that if you named it, you're greater than it.

So it's known that he himself is man. He's Adam. That's what God named him.

And he, man, is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. The one mightier is the one who named him. And this is God.

It will become hopefully a little more clear in a minute why Solomon is sort of beating around the bush here. He is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. So, what are we talking about here? Pursuing causes, pursuing goals, pursuing the fulfillment of desires, and not ending up with any merit, with anything eternal.

Who is it that decides whether something has merit? It's the one mightier than us. It's the one who named us. It's God himself.

And once again, this is an advance in thinking for ancient Israel because people measured everything in terms of what happened in this life. If the man's rich, God's blessing him. If the man has many children, God is blessing him.

If I do well, I will be vindicated in circumstances and people will be able to see. There's a very simple one-to-one correspondence. The level of my obedience equals the level of my prosperity.

The more obedient I am, the more prosperous I am. The more I keep the law, the more people are going to see in me all kinds of divine favor. And that was just the equivalence that was set up in the Hebrew mind.

Well, here Solomon is saying you can have a rich man with many sons and he ends up with nothing. There is one mightier than us who judges the rightness of a cause. We are not able to sit there and judge along with him.

I cannot look at the rich man and judge what he deserves. I can't look at the man with many sons and judge what he deserves any more than I can by extension or the other side of that coin is, I can't look at someone who has a lot of problems and decide that they're under divine discipline or that their life is a wreck and that they're not producing any divine good. It may be quite the opposite.

The affliction and the suffering that someone is experiencing may be the great plowed field where all of their grain is sprouting and all of the fruit of faith and endurance and the fruit of the spirit is growing in abundance. It's a hundredfold field. But when I look at them with my human eyes, all I see is affliction.

All I see is hardship. I think, oh boy, it just doesn't seem like God is really doing much for them. And yet it is because they are in those circumstances that they may be able to bear all this fruit.

On the other hand, I could look at somebody in those identical circumstances and maybe they are under divine discipline. Maybe they are way out in the weeds. And it is divine discipline.

I cannot judge. One mightier than me has to judge. Nobody can judge you based on your circumstances, whether you're prosperous, whether you're in affliction.

Nobody can look at you and judge the value of your cause, whether what you're pursuing is being pursued for the right reasons, whether the way you're walking your walk is accruing any permanent, eternal value. The one that named us, the one that called us by our name long ago is the one qualified to judge that issue. And that has to be the focus.

I do what I do because God is evaluating. God is judging. We are enjoined in the New Testament to do what we do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men for that very reason.

Man has no ability to judge. There are people who are touted and feated and awarded and honored for things and they had the basest of motives in doing what they did. And there are other people who do heroic, selfless acts that will reflect the glory of God for all eternity that nobody even knows about.

It's God who judges. So when we come down to verse 11, it says, "...since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better?" What this literally says is, "...for there are many words." This is our old friend Davar, Davrim, Divarim, which means word. There are many words.

Remember when we talked about the sound of the fool is heard in many words and many answers. The dream comes in many answers and the sound of a fool in many words. Very same

phrase we have here.

In many words, Havel is multiplied. In many words, Havel is multiplied. And then we have two words that conclude the verse.

Actually three. Ma yoter la'adam. What is left over to man? You can talk.

You can justify. You can rationalize. You can make a case with all kinds of words.

But the question is, what is left over to man? This word yoter is the same one we saw up above in verse 8. What is left over to the wise? What's going to survive? What is it that's not Havel? Many words multiply vapor. It's like a bunch of people talking on a cold day. The question is, what is left over to man? What's going to be left over when the one mightier than us judges? This is the question.

Then verse 12 says, For who knows what is good for man in life all the days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? We need to do some translation work on that verse. But even as it stands, what is the answer to that question? Who knows what is good for man in life? It's the one mightier than he. It's the one who called him by his name long ago.

Who knows and can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? It's the one mightier than he, the one who called him by his name long ago. And what Solomon is saying here, he's not throwing up his hands and saying, who knows? I don't know. Who knows what's good for man in life? This is the way this verse is often read.

He's saying, think about it. Who is it that knows the answer to these questions? Who is it that can look at your life and evaluate your motives and can tell that your cause is truly just? Who can assign righteousness to you based on faith? Who can put in your hand the thing that will not vanish away at the setting of the sun? It is the one mightier. It is the one who called us by our name.

It's God himself. So Solomon is, look at the beginning of the chapter and look at the end. We started out looking at possessions and looking at multiplication of children and not having the ability to partake because God has given him these things and he doesn't have the ability to seize and lay hold.

What is it that God can give you? God can give you something that is left over, that transcends riches, that transcends fame, that transcends accomplishment, transcends children and posterity, that transcends anything that might be written on your headstone. He can take our brief life under the sun that passes like a shadow and bring forth from it something left over, good that is beautiful, a soul that is filled with good. But we have to be looking at that.

It doesn't make sense when you think about the history of the nation of Israel that this is the thing

they missed. How did they become legalistic? How did they become wrapped up in the law? This people draws near to me with their lips but their heart is far from me. This is what they missed.

This is what Solomon is trying to warn them about and guard against, is going through the motions and doing the accomplishments, doing the tasks, doing the list of things and missing the heart connection with God that makes it worthwhile, that causes it to last beyond the grave. That's the question. What is left over to man? Same question he asked at the beginning of the book.

What is the profit after all is said and done? So he recapitulates that in slightly different terms here. Well, this concludes chapter 6 and when we get into chapter 7 we're going to get into another didactic section where we're going to get some of the answers to that question. We know that it's what God honors and what God values that counts.

Well, we're going to start to get the instruction that gives us the substance of that beginning in chapter 7 and that's where we will resume next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank You for the truth contained in Your Word that communicates to us the meaning and the purpose and the very definition of our lives.

We thank You that we are not left as orphans. We are not left without guidance. We are not left to our own devices or to our own feeble wisdom.

You have given us guidance. You've given us Your Spirit to lead us into all truth. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these things to our souls and give us the perspicacity, the clear vision to see the areas in our lives where we may be feeding on wind, where we have not analyzed ourselves to see where we are doing things simply to satisfy an appetite, simply to achieve a goal, and we have not factored in our identity and our place in Your plan.

We pray that in all things our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be glorified. We ask it in His name. Amen.