

01-10-07b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in the book of Ecclesiastes. We are attempting to finish chapter six and move into chapter seven. I read this to you earlier and didn't really help out a whole lot but the translation verses seven through 12 is the most recent section that we have covered.

Again, in the New King James, all the labor of man is for his mouth and yet the soul is not satisfied for what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have who knows how to walk before the living? And in some cases, in fact, I mentioned to you all that I'm working on a translation of Ecclesiastes that we can work from that will make some of the things more clear, I think, than what we find in some of the commercially translated versions. But I will tell you in advance that the translation that I'm going to give you is a very woodenly literal translation. Almost always when you come to Hebrew or Greek, the word order is different in that language than we employ in English.

And in order to make reasonable sense and to have it flow and be something worth memorizing and reading in public and so on, translators will move things around and change their relationships and smooth out vocabulary and try to find the best word that will make a smooth flow of thought in English. And that's great for that purpose. That's one of the merits, if you think there are any, of the NIV, is it's a very smooth reading translation.

And if you want to read a whole book and have a connected flow of thought, the NIV was engineered to do that. The word-by-word, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter form of study generally requires a more literal translation. And this is where the New American Standard of the commercially available translations does a pretty good job.

It has been criticized for being too wooden. And in my book, that's a good thing because you can often see things that were a part of the original text in a woodenly literal translation you wouldn't see otherwise. But even there, there are some, I have some reservations about the NASB that have to do with the text families and the choices that were made in terms of text criticism in deciding what version of the text to use.

And they are also sometimes kind of free in what they do. And really, you can't just look at a translation and get where you need to be if you're doing in-depth study. You have to have the original and work from that and give a passable, woodenly literal working translation, which is basically what I'm doing.

Well, I say all of that to say that when I'm not saying that your New King James or your New American Standard or even the NIV is bad or that my translation is better than theirs or that it needs correction. But the reason I'm giving you a different translation is because for our purposes, we need it. We want to try to get as close to the original Hebrew as we can, as close to the original emphasis, the word plays, the word order.

You can see interconnections in thought and between passages, between verses. When Solomon employs *halak* so often in chapter one, he uses it for the wind, he uses it for the water, he uses it for the sun. And each of those, to make a smooth English translation, we wouldn't say, well, the water walks down to the sea or the sun walks across the sky or the wind walks across the earth and then returns again.

It just doesn't fly in English. But it's helpful to know that that's the word that is used in each case, because later on, he's going to use it of other things. In fact, we have it in our passage here.

So that's why. I just don't want to act like I'm putting myself out as the world's greatest Hebrew scholar and that I've got a better translation than anybody ever came up with. It serves our purpose.

I think it's needful for our particular study. And so with that caveat, let me give you a different translation in verses seven through 11 here. Verse seven, all man's work is for his mouth.

And of course, mouth is the literal word, but it is put for appetite. You know, what's the thing about your mouth? That's where you taste things. That's where you are gratified as you eat food.

Granted, your tummy may growl and you may have a sensation of hunger, but generally the idea of appetite and of gratification isn't the feeling of stuffedness that you get in your tummy. It's the enjoyment you get from the taste. This is why we season food.

We could just stir up a nice paste and shovel it into our tummy and feel full. So the mouth stands in as a sort of a metaphor for the appetite. All man's work is for his mouth, gratification, enjoyment, and yet the soul is not filled and a full soul is something that Solomon has already addressed earlier when we studied the topic of good that is beautiful.

A man can look at his soul and say that his work is good, but a soul that is filled with good that God recognizes is an entirely different thing. And this is what Solomon is working his way around to. So all man's work, and this is what they like to call the *anarthros* use of the noun here, which instead of *ha-adam*, it's just *adam*.

All man's work is for his mouth, yet the soul is not filled. Verse eight, for what is left over to the wise more than the fool? Well, left over implies that something has happened. If you have a meal and everybody gets up and goes in the other room and the lady that's gonna clean up the kitchen, she's often all by herself there.

All the rest of the family scatters when it's time to do the dishes. And so the lady looks at the table and there's stuff that's left over, but the meal has ended. And now you're looking at what is left over.

You balance your books at the end of the month or at the end of a year. You run your general

ledger and your accounts payable and you do all that stuff and when all is said and done and you do, what, a balance sheet, that shows you what's left over. You have a profit and loss statement.

After everything is added and everything is subtracted, what's left over? Did you make a profit? So this is very specific language here when it says, what is left over to the wise more than the fool? It doesn't mean what do they have right now. That would be still during the meal or still during the month. This is after everything is tallied.

After the current activity is complete. This is after the setting of the sun. This is after death.

What is left over to the wise more than the fool? What, and by implication, the verb is not repeated. It literally says what for the afflicted, knowing to walk conspicuously before the living. But it harks back to the previous verb.

What is left over for the afflicted? And these are the afflicted who know to walk conspicuously before the living. They're not just suffering in silence. They're not in a back alley somewhere.

They're the ones out there with the cardboard sign and the cup. They're the ones who are at the John 3.16 mission or the aid station, or they are making visible their poverty. They're advertising their need.

They're walking conspicuously before the living. Well, this is two different ways of having your needs met. You can either have skill in business, skill in making your way through the obstacles of life, or you can appeal to those who do have the skill and be a charity case, advertise your need and have somebody come help you.

So whether you're wise and not foolish or whether you're an industrious poor person, you're an afflicted person who knows how to appeal to the system, you walk conspicuously before the living, what is left over to you after death? Even if you get over. You know, there are panhandlers who make more money than I do. Out there, especially if you've got a visible problem.

There are people who are missing a limb or something. They've got a perfectly good prosthetic, but they'll go out there on the corner without it and be there with a missing arm or a missing leg or whatever. They have dentures, but they'll take them out and make themselves look as, you know, they walk conspicuously before the living and they will make hundreds of dollars an hour.

And not in every case. There are legitimate people who are just... But this reminds me a lot of what we were talking about earlier in the week about people who desperately want God's favor, who desperately want God's blessing, who desperately want God's approval, and they spend all their time asking for it and singing about it and waving their hands and raising their eyes to the rafters. Well, the approval and the blessing and the favor of God are worthy things, but there is a means to get them.

And, you know, finances are a worthy thing and we're not supposed to owe anyone anything.

We're supposed to pay our bills. We're supposed to be responsible.

And there are poor people who are in financial distress, but the answer is not to stand on the curb with a cardboard sign. There is a... You know, in this country, in this metroplex, there are literally hundreds of ways. When I was a full-time pastor up in Oklahoma, almost every day, every other day, somebody would call.

They're about to shut my electricity off. I've got five kids here. My husband left me, et cetera, et cetera.

I just blew into town and I have to send to my name. Here's somebody walking down the curb. You see what their needs are.

And even in the small town in which we lived, there were, I had two full sheets of paper of resources and places. Places that would help out with people who have trouble with their bills. Places where people could get food and clothing and shelter.

The, what do they call it, Luke's closet or somebody's closet where you could go and there were, kind of like when people give things to Goodwill, well, these weren't even sold. They were just given away. People would donate their no longer useful clothing and then people that were in need could just come and take whatever they needed.

There is no reason for anybody in Dallas to be standing on a curb with a sign. Even if they have a legitimate need, even if they're not a panhandler making hundreds of dollars an hour, maybe they have a legitimate need, but that is not the way to get that need met. There are legitimate ways.

You can almost always find a job. Most of the people who are unemployed, it isn't that they are not employable. It is that they haven't found a job that they find suitable.

I mean, almost everybody could flip burgers, but who wants to flip burgers for a living? You know, it can prevent you from getting other opportunities. But here's the point. If you have a need and you meet it either by skill or by being prominent or conspicuous before the living, let's say you do get that need met.

Let's say that you do accomplish your goal and that need is met. What are you going to have left over when the sun sets? When you stand before the judgment of God, Old Testament saint, New Testament saint, is God going to query you on whether or not you were wise enough or crafty enough or conspicuous enough to get your needs met? What is He going to be looking for? It's going to be something other than the attainments of this life. People tend to measure attainment by wealth and fame, but here Solomon says a lot of people measure by how well they meet their needs.

How well did I get my needs met? Whatever they may be. Whether I'm rich or whether I'm poor.

Whether I'm on top of things or whether I'm afflicted.

A lot of people measure their success by how well they managed to get their needs met. And Solomon says, whether you're afflicted or whether you're wise, what's going to be left over? What's going to be at the bottom of the balance sheet when the final totals are run? And this is like we saw in Psalm 118. You've got to look beyond the moment.

You've got to look beyond the meeting of immediate needs. Granted, everybody wants their immediate needs met, but not as your ultimate goal. Even the meeting of these needs is a means to an end.

It is an arena for the function of faith. And of course, people who are not functioning in faith, even if they accomplish that goal, they're going to have nothing in their hand. They're feeding on the wind.

So then in verse nine, it says, in the New King James, better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. A literal translation of this, better, and in verse nine, the actual word there is tov, which is good, but in this construction, it comes to mean better. Better the vision of the eyes than the walking of the soul.

And this is halak. And he concludes by saying, this also is vapor and feeding on wind, pasturing on the wind. Better the vision of the eyes than the going forth of the soul.

Halak, when you use it with reference to a soul, the soul is not used for desire and walking. I don't know how they get wandering of desire out of this. There's a perfectly good word for wandering, and there's a perfectly good word for desire, and neither one of them are here.

This is the halak of the nefesh. And halak, when it's used of nefesh, nefesh means to go forth. It's also used of the wind in chapter one, very same vocabulary, except you've got, I think, ruach there.

But an invisible thing, it's going forth. Better the vision of the eyes than the going forth of the soul. So one paraphrase of this would be, it's better to be here looking around than having your soul leave.

And Solomon labels this perspective as vapor and feeding on wind. If you think the vision of the eyes is better than the going forth of the soul, you know, a lot of people say, well, I don't really know what's gonna happen at death. I'm not real sure.

People give all kinds of different answers when you ask them what's gonna happen after death. A lot of believers say, well, everybody will be happy over there. We're all in Christ.

And it doesn't matter how I live my life. Every tear will be wiped away. It'll all be forgotten as far as the East is from the West.

And I'm gonna have maximum blessing, walking the streets of gold and doing all these wonderful things. So, but that's then and this is now. And right now, I'm going to look around and see what needs to be done in this life.

I see things before me right now that are my priorities, and I'm not worried about what's coming. And it's better to be alive than dead. I'd rather be here than there.

A lot of people, whether they admit it or not, have a little bit of uncertainty about what's gonna happen after death. And they say, you know, better the vision of the eyes. I'd rather see what I'm seeing than close my eyes and have my soul depart.

You know, Rock of Ages, one of the last verses says, while I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes are closed in death, then I'll rise to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne and so on. But closing of the eyes in death is a phrase that goes back thousands of years. Well, the vision of the eyes, your eyes are not closed in death and your soul has not gone forth.

So I think this is the idea here. People say it's better to have your eyes open and be looking around in the world, looking at material things than this unknown journey of the soul. The soul is gonna go forth, not real sure where, not real sure what it's gonna encounter.

It's gonna take a trip. And it may or may not be on the old gospel ship, but it's gonna take a trip. And it's better to be here looking around than the traveling of the soul.

That's literally what it says. Better the vision of the eyes, the seeing of the eyes, than the walking of the soul, traveling or going forth. This, Solomon says, this idea that he just expressed is vapor and feeding on wind.

You might have that perspective for a few years here on earth, but you're gonna regret it through all eternity because you did not look ahead, you didn't pay attention to the fact that the soul is going to take a trip. The soul is gonna go forth and arrive somewhere and you'd better make provision for the end of that journey. And if all you're doing is looking around in this life, in fact, Paul says this in the New Testament when he's talking about resurrection.

Remember that real famous section in Corinthians where he's talking about, there are some who say that there's no resurrection. He says, if there's no resurrection, then Christ is not raised and you're still dead in your sins. And he says, if there's no resurrection, he says, if we have hope in this life only, if all of our expectations, if all of our goals and what we hope for is all in this life, he says, we are of all men most miserable.

If hope is confined, let me see if I can find that passage for you. I've mentioned it a few times. I haven't actually looked it up.

I believe it's 1 Corinthians chapter, I'm on about 15. Yes, 1 Corinthians 15, verse 13. But if there

is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ whom he did not raise up, if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

And this is the idea of perished utterly. Verse 19, if in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. And the Greek word there means miserable.

We are of all men most miserable, most to be pitied. Well, this same idea is present here in Ecclesiastes. If your thinking is all about this life, if you're all consumed with the vision of the eyes here instead of the traveling of the soul later, this is havel, it's vapor.

Feeding on the wind. You think you're stuffed and you're not. Now verse 10, in the New Kings James, it 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. I would offer you a literal translation. 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, man. And he is not able to judge with the one mightier than he.

That which is was long ago called by its name and it is known that he himself is Adam. The name of this thing which is, is Adam. This is man.

This is the human condition. This is the way things are for us. That which is was long ago called by its name.

You remember the naming of Adam back in Genesis chapter one. God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them.

Tells him all the things that he's given to them. And then in chapter two, it talks, again, specifically about his formation out of the dust of the ground. And in verse 16, the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden, you may freely eat.

But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Of course, they did eat of it.

And in the course of resolving that in chapter three, verse 19, in the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

So the transient nature of human life, the fact that there is a setting of the sun, the fact that there is a traveling of the soul, the nefesh is going to halak out of this life, was ordained by God. Its name was called long ago. And this is a known fact.

Nobody has an excuse for failing to take this into consideration in their calculations today. Everybody knows about physical death. You cannot live long on this earth, even as a child, without seeing a grandparent or a relative or an acquaintance die and coming to grips with the fact of death.

It's part of the human experience. Well, this is what exists, and it's known. It was long ago called by its name.

God ordained it. That's how life is. It ends.

And the second conclusion you draw when you look around is we are not able to judge with the one who is mightier than us. The last half of the verse says, and he is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. And then it says contend in a lot of the English translations, but it's the same mistake that's made over in Genesis chapter six, and it is a mistake to translate this contend.

It's a complete conjecture on somebody's part because the verb here is din, D-I-N, or D-Y-N. It's a dalet, a yod, and a nun. And that is the verb from which the noun Dan comes.

Dan means judge. The verb means to judge, to evaluate something, to form a conclusion. It means to administrate.

It means to set policy. It means to determine the rightness or wrongness and exert authority to see that the right comes to pass. That's what din means.

Now Genesis six talks about the angels who kept not their first estate that God put down here to judge man. They were here to administrate, to implement justice and give guidance and steer man down the right path in the infancy of human civilization. Well, man is not able to judge with the one mightier than he.

To give something a name is to demonstrate your authority over it, your superiority to it. The name means a lot. God's name, Jesus has the name that is above all other names.

That means he has authority that's above all other authorities. He has the authority to name everything else. We're going to get a new name when we go into the eternal future.

When you read Revelation two and three, if we're overcomers, we'll have the overcomers are going to get a new name. You name something, it is higher than you. Well, the one mightier than man is God.

God's the one that named us long ago. And we are not able to judge with him. His judgment supersedes ours.

His judgment is greater than ours. And this is the second conclusion that man should draw. First of all, a man looks around and sees that God has ordained lifetimes, lifespan.

God has called this situation into existence, called man into existence, and also ordained that we would die. So what is going to be left over at the point of that death? Well, it's going to be God's judgment that counts. We cannot make that evaluation.

God is mightier than us. God set this whole system up. God is the one who is able to judge more than us.

So then when you get to verse 11, it says in the New King James, since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better? But what we literally have here is, for there are many words which multiply vapor or multiply vanity. There are many words which multiply havel, multiply vapor. How is man judged as good? How is man judged to be good? This is the question.

Well, he's just mentioned, man is not able to judge with the one mightier than he. We have to be careful about drawing conclusions about one another. This is the favorite pastime.

It's easy to look and decide what someone else deserves or how well someone else is doing. It's much more difficult to evaluate ourselves. There is a great quote from John Donne.

Remember John Donne lived way back in the several hundred years ago, but he's often quoted. He said, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

Yeah, and you know, we've got a book called For Whom the Bell Tolls and all that, but that's a part of John Donne's poem. And basically he's talking about the situation where you hear the church bell ringing for a funeral and you say, well, I wonder who it is that died. And he says, therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, whose turn it was to leave this life.

It tolls for thee. You should be reminded every time you hear the bell tolling that your life is measured in days. And this was the same thing when we studied Jesus' parable where he talked about, you know, it's easy for you to start trying to decide are there many or few who will be saved? And he says, you need to be striving.

Don't be worrying about how many other people are going to be saved. You strive to enter the narrow gate. There are going to be many who don't make it.

But he says, anytime that subject comes up, you think about yourself. I think about this when people start debating eternal security. All kinds of arguments and time spent and books written on eternal security.

Is it once saved, always saved? Can you sin so badly that you lose your salvation? Well, I think there is an answer to that question and we should know it. But when you boil everything down, I don't really care if there's eternal security or not in one sense. Because I'm going to be nowhere near that line.

If it's possible to lose your salvation, what would it take? Well, you'd have to be somewhere far from God. Well, ultimately the only soul that I can determine the fate of is my own. And I fully intend to be nowhere near any real or imagined line where you could lose your salvation.

So it's a total hypothetical for me. I mean, suppose you could lose your salvation. Well, I don't intend.

If I'm doing what I'm supposed to, I have no fear of that anyway. And I hope you take that in the spirit it's offered. I'm not saying it's unimportant to know and eternal security is a fact.

But to really spend any time debating it or trying to convince someone else, I mean, ultimately what you want to be convincing people of is draw near to God and let Him draw near to you. Eternal security is a moot point. If you can sing, I'm saved and I know that I am and you're enjoying fellowship with God and growing in grace and knowledge of the Savior, it's one of these angels on the head of a pin type of things anyway.

It's always going to be applied to someone else. Well, that guy over there lost his salvation. If I'm doing what I'm supposed to, it doesn't matter.

Well, same idea here. How do you find out whether or not what you're doing is pleasing in God's sight? Well, you have to submit it to His judgment. You have to recognize that He is the one qualified to judge.

It's His criteria that are going to be in use, not our own. We might judge by whether or not our needs were met. We might judge by the magnitude of our accomplishments.

We might judge by a number of different factors, but it is God's judgment that counts. And this is what verse 12 goes on to say. Who knows what is good for man in life? All the days of his vapor-like life, literally in Hebrew, this says, for, who knows what is tov, for man, in his life with the measure of days of his life.

And then it has havel with the masculine singular suffix, which means his vapor. Who knows what is good for man in his life in the measured number? This is mispar, sefer or sefer means the count, the number. And you put a name in front of that, it makes it a noun.

So this is the measure, the measure of the days of the life of his vapor is what it literally says, of his havel, hevlo. And once again, understanding, it's critically important to remember what havel means. It is the impermanence, it's the short duration, the transient nature, the temporariness,

impermanence.

So the measure, you know, our life is like a, you know, out, out, brief candle type of thing. Elton John candle in the wind, buff of wind comes. Your flame goes out.

So who does know what is good for man in life, in the days of his life of vapor, which he passes like a shadow. And once again, what's the nature of a shadow? Insubstantial, there and gone, you move, shadows. You know, one minute there's a shadow, next minute there's not.

Depends entirely on the light. He passes like a shadow. Who can tell a man what will happen after him? Takhat ha-shamesh, under the sun.

Well, there is an answer to this question and it's referred to back in verse 10. It is the one mightier than he, the one who calls him by his name. He's the one that judges, he's the one that knows.

And so this is a strongly phrased call to Israel to go beyond superficial observance of the law, to go beyond the superficialities of life, the mundane nature of daily existence, and to think about the God behind the law, to think about the God who called the human race into existence, who called Israel into existence, who called believers with a heavenly call, and to work logically up from the fact that if you're strutting and fretting your hour on the stage but the curtain is going to be drawn, what's going to be left over? Who can tell you about that? Well, it's the one who called it all into existence. It's the one who is mighty and is qualified to judge, and it's God. So it is a call to remember God.

It's the first and great commandment. I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Don't make yourself a graven image. Don't try to boil God down to concrete terms. Don't take his name in vain.

How do we do that? It's one thing to hear that call. It's another thing to implement it in daily life. Well, it's the same thing we talked about in our first lesson this morning.

God has to be given his place to meditate on his word, to call him to mind, to expose ourselves to his word and then to return to it time and again as the grist for our mental mill. To meditate on it day and night, to treat it as fact, to treat it as important in our considerations, in our machinations as we weigh our options and evaluate our priorities. As we accomplish the tasks that we accomplish, we should ask ourselves, not do I think this is a good thing or does this please me? Is this something that satisfies my mouth? All man's work is for his mouth, but the soul is not filled.

How can I do this in a way that my soul is going to be filled with the righteousness that partakes of God's righteousness? Well, it's got to be an expression of faith. Whatever is not of faith is sin. We've got to weave our spiritual life and nature into the fabric of our daily life and not keep them

separate like oil and water.

And it is a struggle. It is something we have to consciously pursue, something we have to work at. People kind of get antsy when you incorporate any kind of work into the Christian life.

We like to think it's all of grace and it's all passive, but it's not. Agonizomai is a verb in the middle form, which means it's something you have to involve yourself in. You put yourself into the wrestling match.

You put yourself into the struggle and you actively pursue, you strive to enter through the narrow gate that leads to life, that leads to the feasting table with the Lord of the house. There are many words that multiply vapor. There are many words.

There's a lot of things that are being said. There are a lot of books. There are a lot of sermons.

There are a lot of ministries. There are a lot of viewpoints. There are a lot of philosophies.

There are a lot of conversations. Lots of chatter going on about life, how to get ahead in life. You know, how two books occupy aisles in the bookstores, even Christian bookstores, and they multiply vapor.

We want to get at that which lasts. And thanks be to God, we have a great book that tells us how, and it's the book under our gaze this morning. It's Kohelet's book, Ecclesiastes.

Well, I think we've done a good job of finishing chapter six with a flourish, and so next time we'll move into chapter seven and see why a good name is better than precious ointment and why the day of death than the day of one's birth. Kind of an odd thing to say, but from the perspective that Solomon gives us here, it will make a lot of sense. But this is a good place to close a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank you for your grace and your faithfulness to us. We appreciate your patience and your loving kindness toward us as we struggle and err and come short again and again. We thank you that your grace is sufficient for our needs.

You have not only called us with a heavenly calling, but you have given us the means to implement it with the presence of your spirit and the power of your word. We thank you for the intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus as he sits at your right hand and makes our case before you. And we ask that these provisions will not be made in vain.

We pray that we will grow in grace and knowledge, that we will be fruitful fields, fruitful that our lives will not have been a waste of time that when the sun sets and we stand before you, there will be that present for which you saved us and for which you have equipped us. And we pray that we can see those things clearly in the daily opportunities of our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

