

01-10-14b Ecclesiastes

To resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, we have seen the first verse that states that a name is better than good ointment. And the day of death, and then you would supply in italics, is better than the day of birth. Well, we've seen now by looking particularly at the passage in Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 1, a little bit of why a name is important.

This is not a name among men. We tend to think, and especially with the English translation there, when it says a good name, we think, well, this is my good name. This is my reputation among men.

People have gone to this verse to support the idea that your witness and your testimony is important in the world because your good name, that's your witness. That's your reputation among men, and that's got to be good so that you can be a good evangelist. We can save that argument for another time, but the point here is that this is a name with reference to God, because especially looking at the previous passage in Proverbs 22, in the previous context, what's the verse that just preceded this? Who knows what is good for man in life? Well, there's an answer to that question.

God knows what is good for man in life. Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? Well, God can tell a man what will happen to him after the sun has set. And that is why a name is better than good ointment, and why the day of death is better than the day of birth, because God is not going to intervene at the day of birth.

You have not yet made the decisions that are going to be the basis for God's judgment of blessing or cursing, of reward or of discipline on the day of birth. The day of death is good, because that is the day when potentially God will intervene for good. God does not intervene on the day of birth.

And this is the context. Who knows what is good for man, or what is good from a man in his life? What was good in your life? What is going to be established? Remember Moses at the end of Psalm 90, when he prays to God, establish the work of our hands. What is it that's beautiful? What is it that is Yahweh? What is it that is going to last and reflect the glory of God to subsequent generations? It is all about God.

That is the context, and that is why a name is better than good ointment. What is ointment good for? The physical world. You put ointment on a wound.

You put Bengay on your sore shoulders. You put solar cane on a sunburn. You put chapstick on parched lips.

We have ointments in the modern day, just like they had them in the ancient day. Ours are probably a lot better than theirs, because we have things that are actually efficacious. We've got

aloe vera.

Of course, they may have known about aloe vera even back then. But we have wonderful medicines and topical treatments, antibiotic creams. I was quite astonished.

I had a co-worker sustain a very minor injury that involved a scrape, and I went down to the first aid kit to try to get some ointment. There wasn't any ointment in there. They had all kinds of Band-Aids, but the only thing to prevent infection and aid healing that was even close, they had those packets of alcohol, gauze patches soaked in alcohol.

Well, the person involved, being female, wanted nothing to do with an alcohol swab being put on this, you know, where you knock a pretty good patch of hide off and all the nerves are hanging out. You've got those little tiny capillary bleeding going on there. The last thing you want to do is wipe that with an alcohol wipe, but there wasn't any ointment.

So I went to the human resources people and said, hey, we need some kind of topical antiseptic and antibiotic cream or ointment in our first aid kit. They said, you mean there's none in there? Nobody knew that it wasn't there. But we have this.

But what's that good for? Well, that's your body. That sort of speaks of life under the sun, that you sustain an injury. It's going to be temporary, hopefully.

You put something on it and it heals it up and that comes and goes. Your name is something that lasts. The extent to which you are known by God, the extent to which God is going to be able to express hen, C-H-E-N, which is grace, it's unmerited favor.

We probably ought to look at this word hen, which we found in Proverbs 22.1 as a parallel to the word name. This is from the verb hanan, C-H-A-N-A-N. You see this showing up in names.

You remember there was an Old Testament character called Elhanan, Elhanan, which means God is gracious, El, Elohim. God shows favor. God is gracious, Elhanan.

Well, hanan means to show favor or be gracious. This was used, Janelle and I were talking on the break about are there Old Testament terms that deal with hospitality and so forth. This word is used in dealing with the poor and needy and orphans in places like Psalm 37.21, Psalm 37.26. Psalm 37.21 says the wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.

This is hanan, a form of hanan. Five verses later in that same psalm, Psalm 37.26 says he is ever merciful and lends and his descendants are blessed. So this is someone who expresses generosity.

You get the idea here that this is unmerited or favor that is not secured by any guarantee of repayment. You have the same idea over in Proverbs 14.31. He who oppresses the poor

reproaches his maker, but he who honors him, honors God, his maker, has mercy on the needy. This is once again from hanan.

Well, hen is the noun that comes from this verb. It is used in terms of favor or acceptance, to find favor in the eyes of someone. It is used this way many times.

I was mentioning to Janelle in the break, I thought a likely passage to find this was over in the story of Esther. Did I mention that while we were live and online about Esther and the scepter? This is the idea, Esther 5.8, the word is actually used. She comes to the king and she says, if I have found favor in the sight of the king, this is Esther 5.8, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to this banquet that I am going to prepare.

She has this series of banquets and Haman is getting more and more puffed up and proud of himself. This is used in that story. It is used again in chapter 7 and verse 3, where she goes in and risks her life to make an appeal on behalf of her people.

In 7.3, Queen Esther answered and said, if I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition and my people at my request. This is Ken. This is favor from one who is in a position to grant it, because they have the resources, they have the authority.

You are looking upward at someone and hoping for their favor or their grace. So this is not a name among people. This is a name with God.

He is the divine majesty from whom this grace can come. This is used of God quite often, even early in the book of Genesis. Genesis 6.8 is very famous.

It has even been made into a song. Old Tennessee Ernie Ford used to sing this song about Noah coming to rest on Mount Ararat. But the name of that song is, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

That is Genesis 6.8. The word for grace there is Ken, our word. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. You will notice that there was a basis for this grace coming on Noah.

There are a lot of people in Reformed theology who like to say that God is inscrutable. He just throws a dart at the map and decides that somebody is going to be the parents of the humanity of the Lord. Or he throws a dart at the map and decides that somebody is going to be the survivor in the ark and everybody else is going to perish.

There is a basis for these decisions by God to express and dispense grace. It is faith. Without faith, Hebrews 11.6, it is impossible to please God.

He that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of whom He inscrutably

randomly picks. It doesn't say that. It says that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Those who are diligently seeking Him are the ones to whom God can grant divine favor, grace. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. What is the first thing we find out about Noah in Genesis 6? Noah was upright and perfect in his generation.

He was mature. He was complete. In Genesis 18, a famous chapter, at least in my mind it is famous.

It is prominent. Remember the covenant in Genesis 17 of circumcision? Then God walks by the tent of Abraham in Genesis 18. You have the appearance of these three individuals and the interaction.

The two of them are going to go on down and visit Lot in Sodom. But at the beginning, Abraham sees these individuals coming by. This is a manifestation of God Himself.

Abraham just basically goes nuts. He says, go get the calf and make the bread. Let's sit down and have a meal.

Then he goes to the prominent individual among these three. He says, My Lord, if I have now found favor in your sight, do not pass on by your servant. He doesn't pass on by.

He stays and waits for the bread to bake and for the calf to be slaughtered. You know this took hours. You don't just take a live calf and pop it in the microwave.

Six minutes later you've got burgers. This took time. He took the measures.

Remember we talked about the three measures of meal when we were studying Luke and the woman that leavened the three measures of flour? Where did the three measures come from? Sarah took three measures and made the meal for these divine visitors. This took time. So he did find favor.

He did stop and not pass by. Why did God stop by and have a meal with Abraham and not with Lot or not with anybody else in that generation? There is a basis for it. Abraham believed God and it was credited to his account for righteousness.

There is a basis for receiving divine favor. There is a basis for the dispensation of Chen and it is the name. Establishing a name with God.

God knew the name of Abraham. God knows the name of the righteous. They are known by him.

We looked at those passages Friday night in our study of Luke. Remember over in 1 Corinthians, I think it's in chapter 8, where Paul says something about the something of God stands having this seal. The Lord knows them that are his.

That is a truth expressed several places over in Galatians, in the Psalms. God knows the righteous. If you know someone you know their name.

It is the name that counts. So this is the word that we have in Proverbs 22.1, paralleled with the name that is better than riches. Then, the opportunity to approach and be recognized and be smiled upon, be granted favor from the king, from God.

That is your name. That is what is more valuable than riches. Why? God is eternal.

We will live in eternity with him. Nothing that is temporary can be compared. What is gold and silver? What is anything in this life compared with divine favor that lasts forever? That is the thing we want to pursue.

So that is what we have in our passage in Ecclesiastes 7.1. So that tells us what to be thinking about when we look at the house. Is this the day of birth or the day of death? Which one is better to contemplate? The day of death is a good day if you meditate on it. Moses said in Psalm 90, God turns man to destruction.

Destruction is the end of everything. It is when things cease. It is the setting of the sun.

God turns us to that and when we look at that and have a change of mind, this is a good thing. That is why the day of death is better than the day of birth. Better in what sense? It is better to contemplate.

It is a source of motivation. I don't tend to look back. I don't even remember anything about my birth.

I can look at the birth of my own children. I can note the birth of children all around and see little babies and so on. That is a wonderful thing, beginning of life, and it is great.

But focusing on the day of death is more profitable to me. There are a lot of people who say, well, they had this program, I may have mentioned it before, where they were talking about how people are so anxious to have children. If they are infertile or there is some problem, now they have the technology and they do this through the test tube idea where they can take an egg.

They were talking about there are women whose eggs are not capable of turning into babies because they lack something. Maybe the DNA is okay, but the contents of the cell that support replication and the division of making perfect copies of the genetic material is not there. Now what they can do is they take the nucleus of an infertile woman's egg out.

They just suck it out of there with what looks like a little microscopic baster thing. They suck the nucleus out and then they take a donor egg from a healthy young woman and they suck the nucleus out of that and then they score in the nucleus from the woman with the unhealthy eggs because the chromosomes are okay, but the ability to replicate them and turn it into a healthy

fetus and child isn't there. So they will artificially fertilize, they'll get the husband's sperm and they'll fertilize the woman's egg who would miscarry in every case, but they take the nucleus out and they put it into a healthy environment, into the golgi bodies and all the other things that are in an egg and they put the nucleus in there and fertilize it with the husband's sperm and then the thing turns into a healthy baby.

They actually showed a baby that had been born this way and this woman had like six miscarriages before that and here she's got, of course it was exorbitantly expensive, some unimaginable amount of thousands of dollars, but they really wanted a child and they got it. Well people have a desire for children and in the ancient world especially, your posterity, this is why the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob where he says your seed will be multiplied, they'll be like the sands of the sea and like the stars of the heaven, was such a great promise because in the ancient world having sons and having offspring to carry on your name and to maintain possession of your land was the most important thing. And to have children is a great promise because to have children born, this was a great day.

I have a son. You see the imagery, they had the Turner network of, I forget if it was Abraham or which one of these specials they had where the son was born and they showed the patriarch holding the baby up as if to God out there in the setting sun and here's this child and this was the greatest day, the birth of a child. Solomon says the day of death is better than the day of birth.

He's not talking about the day of your death is better than the day of your birth. He's saying if you want to compare the beginning of life to the ending of life, what is more profitable? What is something that's going to let you start parlaying time into eternity? It's the day of death. Turn your attention to the fact that the sun is going to set and you're going to have a better life than if you're constantly trying to bring something into the world or just ensure that you have children or that they get launched well.

I may have been a failure and everything else but I see this on TV and movies all the time. I've made a miserable wreck of my life but the only good thing is I had you, my daughter or my son. You're the one gem in this giant pile of fertilizer and everything else went into the hand basket but you're my one accomplishment.

You're the one thing that I haven't messed up and people tend to think giving birth, Yeled, the day of birth is better than the day of death. Solomon says no. You need to concentrate on the fact that your life is coming to an end and you need to do something with the time that's remaining.

Teach us to number our days. So then in verse 2 we start to catch the sense of this a little bit better. It says, better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for that is the end of all men and the living will take it to heart.

Well, I'll give you a literal translation of this because we have our old friend Halak, the word that its root meaning is to walk. Halak, H-A-L-A-K. We saw this first in chapter 1 repeated over and

over about the wind and the water and the sun walking across the sky and everything else.

Well here, literally this would say, better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting. And in the New King James translation when it says, for that is the end of all men and the living will take it to heart, well what does that refer to? Well, it's sort of ambiguous. You think, well, he must sort of be referring to death.

Death is the end of all men. Everybody's going to die and the living will take it to heart, but there's no antecedent for the word that. Right? That is the end of all men.

What does that refer back to? The house of mourning is the end of all men? Well, it doesn't make real good sense. A real woodenly literal translation from the Hebrew here says, better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting, in which itself is the end of all mankind. And what it's talking about is the end of all mankind is in the house of feasting.

In the house of feasting is the end of all mankind. And the living will literally set it upon his heart. Take it to heart is not a bad idiomatic translation here, but it literally says, this is Nathan, which means to give or to set or to place.

And the word al, a-l, means upon and lay of his heart, l-e-v, l-e-v or b, depending on how hard you want to make that consonant. The living will set it upon his heart. So you're going to lay this, people say, well, the Lord laid this on my heart.

You've heard that expression? Well, that's a biblical phrase. The living will set it upon or lay it upon his heart. Lay what upon his heart? That it's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting.

Now, I find this fascinating because halakh is almost lost there in our English translation, but this is focusing on the journey rather than the destination. It doesn't say better to dwell in the house of mourning than to dwell in the house of feasting, does it? That would make real good sense. Well, why don't we just constantly be a sad sack and walk around with a frown and be Puritans and laughing is a sin and you've got to wear a hair shirt and be sorrowful and be smiting yourself with a flagella and all this kind of thing.

It doesn't say it's better to dwell in the house of mourning. It says better to walk to the house of mourning. So this is talking about your destination as you're walking.

Where are you traveling to? It says it's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting. Well, when you're walking to somewhere, today we would say driving. You're going to drive somewhere.

We, over the hill and through the woods to Grandma's house we go. We sometimes take a trip and we go up to Oklahoma and go to Grandma and Grandpa's place. Well, the journey, as you

take the journey, you're thinking about the destination.

You're thinking about, well, when we get there we're going to do this and that and it's going to be joyful and feasting and we're going to have a grand time. If you're traveling to attend a funeral, what are you thinking about? You're not thinking about, oh boy, I bet somebody made a turkey and I bet there's going to be all kinds of great food at the wake or at the after party of the funeral. What do you think about when you're traveling to the house of mourning? The process of going to the house of mourning is sobering because you're thinking about, there but for the grace of God go I. It could be my funeral everybody is traveling to attend.

It's the state of mind as you go there. It doesn't mean just dwell in the house of mourning and be dismal and grieving and sorrowful all the time, but as you're traveling through life, keep in mind that your destination is the house of mourning. The house of feasting here, the word feasting is interesting because it comes from the Hebrew word, the Hebrew verb that means to drink.

It's literally the house of drinking, but the noun that comes from this verb is used for celebration because what do you do when you celebrate? It's l'chaim, you toast. You could translate this the house of toasting if you understand that it's toasting in the sense of clinking glasses together and not putting something in the toaster. But feasting, this is not just feasting in the sense of eating a bunch of food, this is celebration, the house of celebration.

So it's mourning versus celebration. What conditions your journey? Are you looking for another opportunity to celebrate? Are you living from high point to high point? Are you saying where's the pleasure? Where's the joy de vive? I want to feel good. This is what happens when people go to amusement parks.

This is what happens when people go to movies. This is what happens when people get together or go to singles bars or go wherever they go and do whatever they do. Marry people going to social functions, going to the opera, whatever.

People want to go and have a good time. That's your desire. That's what you think about.

That's what gives you encouragement and motivation through your work week. You say, boy, I can't wait for the TGIF mode where I can go out and have some celebration. I want to have some uplifting, pleasurable times.

A lot of people in the church today want to go to the church and do nothing but celebrate. They want to be lifted up by worship leaders and by a sense of awe-inspiring grandeur. I just want to be carried to a higher place on a wave of whatever.

Well, Solomon says it's better to be walking to the house of mourning, to have your thinking and your journey conditioned by the knowledge that we're going to end up looking at death. This is another way of saying that the day of death is better than the day of birth. A birth was a cause for

celebration.

People toasted and gave a feast and invited all the friends over. They had the christening. We say christening now.

Back then they had the circumcision and the entrance of that child into the family and the celebration thereof. He says you're better off when you look at trying to have something permanent out of life. Don't just be living from pleasure to pleasure or celebration to celebration.

Why do we celebrate? We think something good has happened. Well, if you want something good to happen in your life, don't just look for something to celebrate. Think about the fact that life is short, that time must be redeemed, that you are engaged in the struggle to make permanent things that will default to being temporary.

If you do nothing, everything in your life is going to be temporary. You have to be looking for the name so that God can establish your works. If you are qualified, and I use that word advisedly, if you are in the place where God can dispense His grace, because it is conditional.

God's grace is conditional. God reserves mercy for thousands, but He is not unrighteous to forget evil and sin and violation of His standards. God is also righteous and just.

So how can you be those thousands upon whom God dispenses His grace, His mercy? Well, you have to take steps. The default answer is wrath and indignation and judgment. We have to make a choice.

We have to choose the good name. A good name is rather to be chosen. So better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting, in which itself is the end of all mankind.

If you want to see everything that you have come to an end and cease, this word for end is not a real common word in Hebrew. It is used at the end of a ravine. You are traveling up a ravine and then it comes to an end.

Then there is not any place else you can go. It was used earlier in Ecclesiastes, talking about God, where it says that God knows the beginning from the end. This is the termination point.

So all mankind, all of ha-adam, the end of it is to be found in the house of feasting. But asher, but means in and asher means which, in which. Then it has the word hu, which means itself.

In which itself is the end of all mankind. The living, those who are alive, will or should set it upon his heart. If you take this to heart, if you keep it in mind, is our idiomatic phrase in English.

The one who is living and hopes to have his works established and have his life mean something beyond the grave and beyond the time of mourning, will take it to heart, will keep it in mind. Now verse 3, the new King James says, sorrow is better than laughter for by a sad countenance the

heart is made better. Well you remember our word ha-as, k-a-a-s, that we studied a little bit earlier in the book here.

This is aggravation. Remember we talked about being aggrieved, talking about the poor man who walks before the living and that sort of thing. This literally says better aggravation than laughter.

This is the word that its root meaning is to be angry or to be stressed, to be vexed. Another way of saying this would be better vexation. A lot of times when it says that God was provoked to anger through idolatry in Israel, this is the word that is used.

Better vexation or aggravation than laughter. It says by a sad countenance the heart is made better, but this literally says better aggravation or vexation than laughter for in distress of the face, the heart is made good. And the word that is translated sad countenance, this is ra-r followed by the evil ion, our word that is translated evil.

Remember it is an evil answer that God has given the sons of men to be answered with in chapter 1. And we said this doesn't always mean moral evil, in fact it often means calamity or misery. You could say for misery of the face. Now if this was a miserable face or a distressed face, it would be pa-neem followed by the plural of the word for, it would be pa-neem ra-eem.

Here is a good example, turn with me over to Nehemiah chapter 1. You remember in chapter 1 of Nehemiah, he is very stressed out over the status of Jerusalem and he prays to God and he says, O Lord I pray in verse 1, I pray for your servants who desire to fear your name and let your servant prosper this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Because what he wants to do is tend to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and he acknowledges the sin that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem. So then in chapter 2, it came to pass in the month of Nisan in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes when wine was before him that I took wine and gave it to the king.

Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart. So I became dreadfully afraid." Now why would he become dreadfully afraid? Because the king notices that he has a sad heart.

This doesn't really make good sense to me. Well you go back and look in Hebrew and the word here, beginning in verse 1 where it says I had never been sad in his presence before, the word translated sad there is ra. And it means miserable, distressed, vexed, aggravated.

There is a perfectly good word for sorrow in Hebrew and this ain't it. This is the word ra, the same word we had in chapter 1. What kind of an answer is it that God has given the sons of men as a result of sin? It's an evil answer. If you translated this literally you would say I have never been evil in his presence before.

He doesn't just look like he is moping, he is in turmoil, he is in distress. You can imagine what kind of look might have been on Nehemiah's face as he grieves and is anxious about the status

of Jerusalem. So the king said to me, why is your face stressed out? Why is your face full of calamity? Why is your face full of vexation and aggravation? Since you are not sick, this is nothing but evil of heart, vexation of heart, aggravation of heart.

Now you can see why Nehemiah is dreadfully afraid in front of the king. You tend to sympathize with somebody that is sorrowful and sad, but the king is saying look, this aggravated look you have on your face, this is aggravation of heart. I think there is something the matter with you.

This is something he could be called to account for. If he is aggravated, if he is vexed, if he is just struggling to keep himself under control, the king says, look, you look like a loose cannon to me. This strange look you have on your face, there is something the matter in your heart.

The king is getting pretty inquisitive about what is the matter with Nehemiah. He is not saying, oh Nehemiah, you poor thing, you look so sad, what is the matter? He says, I am not sure I trust you. You have a strange, wild look in your eye.

Because he is vexed, he has this indignation boiling inside of him. He is wanting to do something about it and he is barely able to keep himself under control. So this is the idea behind Ra.

There is some sort of calamity involved, some sort of distress, just like we have seen in the other uses of this word. I think it is a mistake. This is another place in the lexicon where they have invented a special definition for Ra and they only list two places, and that is Ecclesiastes and Nehemiah.

It does not fit either place if you look at the context. Somebody that is sorrowful does not need to be dreadfully afraid when the king says, why are you so sad, Nehemiah? But if he looks like he is about to go off, then he would be dreadfully afraid because the king could say, you look unstable to me, I think we will just get rid of you and get somebody else. So I became dreadfully afraid and I said to the king, may the king live forever, why should my face not be vexed? Why should my face not be full of distress and aggravation when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies waste and its gates are burned with fire? This is indignation, this is turmoil that is going on with Nehemiah.

The king said to me, what do you request? I prayed to the God of heaven and then he makes his request. He says, I want to go back and rebuild it. But there are three or four uses of the word Ra here in connection specifically with Nehemiah's face.

It is not sadness. There is no other place in the Bible except this passage in Nehemiah and Ecclesiastes where the lexicon wants to translate Ra, which is the word that means to be evil, calamity. What is the famous verse over there where it says God creates good and creates evil? God dispenses good and creates evil, whatever it is.

It is the word Ra. It does not mean God is the author of moral evil. It means God can bless and

God can curse.

The evil spirit that came to Saul when he was out of line and lost his relationship with God and God withdrew his spirit and sent instead an evil spirit, a spirit of Ra. This was a spirit of vexation, a spirit of disturbance, of aggravation, of something is wrong to Saul. What was that supposed to do? It was supposed to turn him to destruction, to show him that he needed to change his mind, to number his days and pursue wisdom and get right with God and get back with the plan of God before it was too late.

Saul did not respond to that. But God sent him this spirit. He did not send him a demon.

He sent him a spirit of distress, a spirit of vexation, a spirit that made him miserable. You could translate this as misery. What is the result of vexation and aggravation and distress? It is misery.

So a miserable face, misery showing in the face. But here in Nehemiah the difference here is you have panim raim. For some reason face is in the plural.

Maybe it is because we have two of everything, two eyes, two nostrils, two ears. Panim in Hebrew is a dual or a plural word, kind of like the heavens, shamayim, or the seas, mayim. Well your face is a plural word and it is panim.

So any adjectives that go with your face are also in the dual or the plural. So you have literally here the king says why is your face sad? He says why is your panim raim? Well we don't have that in Ecclesiastes. We have the singular of ra rather than the dual.

So this is not a miserable face, this is misery of the face. It seems like a fairly subtle difference, but everything counts. There is a reason why God uses the vocabulary that he uses in his word.

When he says by misery of face or by distress of countenance, if you will, the heart is made tov, the heart is made good. They want to say made better, but it says the better aggravation than laughter. This explains verse 2, doesn't it? The journey to the house of mourning is better than the journey to the house of feasting, of toasting, of celebration.

And the living, if he is smart, will keep it in mind, set it upon his heart. Better aggravation or misery or distress, better vexation than laughter. For in ra of the face, in misery of the face, the heart is made good.

What does that mean? If you want to achieve goodness in your heart, if you want to purify yourself, if you want to achieve something that lasts, if you want to let God establish the work of your hands, you're going to keep in mind that this life is brief and you're not going to be distracted. You're not going to be deflected by celebration and by just judging things by how good it makes you feel. To be sober and diligent, we have to keep in mind that we're on a schedule.

We're about to see this in Luke chapter 13, where the Pharisees come up to Jesus and say, Hey,

Herod wants to kill you. You better get out of here. And Jesus says, Today, tomorrow and the next day I have things to do.

And on that third day I will be perfected. I will be made complete. I will be finished.

But Jesus knew that he had a timetable. He knew that he had a schedule. And this is the same idea here.

If you keep in mind, every minute that ticks by, the day of our death is nearer. The sand is falling through the hourglass. You remember the old soap opera, As sand through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.

The only reason I know that is because I used to be sick once in a while. My grandmother was really a big fan of the soaps. She was babysitting or something.

As sand through the hourglass, as the world turns. It's all about time. Why waste your time watching the soaps, is the conclusion I drew.

But better aggravation than laughter, better misery, better to be aware of what has yet to be completed, what has yet to be done. I am not where I need to be. I hope that there is more time available to me, that the day of my death is a ways off yet, because I want to be better prepared.

I want to be closer to the goal of being approved than I am right now when I face the Lord. Keeping in mind that the time is ticking away keeps me sober. I don't just run around playing video games seeing how stimulated I can become or how happy I can be.

I don't look for, well, let me find the next high point, the next emotional peak. I don't have time for that. I don't have time to sit and play games and get the thrill of blowing away something on the screen.

I don't have time to pursue a lot of things that are basically just there for the pleasure. Let's go ride the roller coaster. Well, a little of that is okay, but I don't want to be journeying to the house of celebration all the time.

I want to keep in mind that I am on the way to the house of mourning and my time is precious. If I want God to establish anything permanent, anything that doesn't turn to vapor, I've got to lay it to heart. I've got to keep it in mind that the sand is running through the hourglass.

So that's why verse 4 says, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. Earlier he said it's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting. There's a process of getting there.

Now the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth, is in the house of gladness. This is a different house than was mentioned in verse 2, but

we'll have to look at that word mirth next time. It's a word that we've already seen.

It's the word that Solomon used when he said to his heart, heart, I am going to test you with mirth. Well, this is the word and it's used several times in Ecclesiastes and it deserves more time than we have remaining. So we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank you for the truth of your word as it draws back the curtain of time and circumstance and shows us eternal things. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us to lay these things to heart and to recognize and to make use of the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.