

01-10-21b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume now our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. We are in verse 7 that in the New King James says, Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason and a bribe debases the heart. Well, we concluded our previous session by noting that the verb here translated destroys the reason is *halal*, which its root meaning is to shine. And it's most common use in the Old Testament is to praise.

Halal, *halelu* means you all. That would be the imperative form. And then *ya* is the short form of God's personal name in Israel, *Yahweh*.

So *halelu-ya* would be praise the Lord. You don't often find *halelu-el*, but that would be an equally valid or *halelu-elohim*, praise God. But praise the Lord is the most common form.

But here the idea of oppression causes the translators to choose a less common meaning of this verb, which is the one found over in Samuel, 1 Samuel, where David fleeing from Saul goes and tries to live with the Philistines and they recognize him and so then he plays the madman. And so they say that oppression destroys a wise man's reason. But the second line helps us figure out exactly how to take this verb.

And that's one of the reasons that a lot of Proverbs and Psalms and other of the poetic and wisdom literature deals in parallels. God has preserved it in this form so that we can work from the parallel and figure out what the original line means and we're not left to wander in darkness. Well, the second line says a bribe debases the heart.

But if you look at the word for bribe, this is simply the word for gift. It is that which is given. It's the noun formed from the verb *natan*.

And we saw this when we saw earlier in Ecclesiastes where it said this is the gift of God. And we retranslated that this is what is given by God. So what is given or a gift and then debases is the New King James translation.

But the word here literally means to destroy. It destroys the heart. We have the verb *abad*, A-B-A-D.

And the verb *abad*, we have also seen this elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, but it means to perish or to cause to perish, cause to be exterminated. This is the intensive form, the P-A-L, imperfect. So it causes the heart to perish or it destroys it or kills it.

And, of course, the heart is the seat of judgment. The heart is where your wisdom does you some good, helps you set your priorities and make your decisions. So taking these two lines together, and bribe is not far off the mark here because this is a gift that is given that is going to sway the heart.

Your heart tells you you ought to be doing one thing, but this gift causes you to do something else. What is the term that we use for someone who is keeping the books at a company and they rig the books and take money for themselves? Embezzlement, right? Well, to commit an act of oppression, to garner to oneself something that isn't rightfully yours, can affect your reason if you take it for yourself, if someone else gives it to you. Many people will keep quiet or will accept something if they get, you know, this is the basis for settling out of court.

You give somebody enough money and they'll drop their lawsuit. Maybe they're right, you know, that people have decried the fact that various chemical industries or drug manufacturers or tire manufacturers or whatever may have done a great injustice or committed a wrong by putting faulty products out or putting dangerous products out. But when they settle out of court, they're not really brought to justice.

They pay the victims an amount of money. They give them this gift of money and then they stop calling out for a right. Part of the terms of the settlement are you will not go to the press, you will not do any more advertising of this egregious wrong that you think we've committed.

You'll just hush up about it and take this money and be quiet. And so many times settling, accepting a gift from someone, you know, hush money we call it. So here's the wise needing to point out the fact that there is oppression or needing to point out the fact that there is a wrong, but a gift hushes him up and accepting this gift is going to destroy the heart.

Where is your credibility if you compromise in this fashion? And this is really at the root of both of these lines. Because to accept oppression, to participate in oppression, to be a quiet bystander and allow oppression to go forward is in the first line and then the gift destroying the heart is in the second line. So which version of halal, which of the meanings, the available meanings, the root meaning to shine very quickly gave way to the verb to praise because you cause something to shine.

You point out how shiny it is, how great it is. You praise something. You know, we even use this phrase in English or we used to back in Mark Twain's day, you know, you can stand up and display your talent or something and say, boy, he really shone in that performance.

This star really shone. You know, a star, why do we call people stars? Well, a star shines. It's a bright light.

And so an actor or somebody, we say, well, he's the star of the show. He's the shining one in the show, the one that stands out and is praised and lauded and so on. So you can see the connection between to shine and to praise in halal.

Well, I don't think here that the meaning which means to overshadow and to overboast, to overpraise into the realm of the ridiculous is really what is in view. I think that what does oppression do? If wise people come up and resist oppression or talk against oppression or try to

overcome oppression, what do you do? Well, you want to silence them in some way. You want to get them to leave you alone and let you continue to oppress.

So what do you do? Well, you flatter them. You praise them. You say, well, look, you know, that point is well taken and we'll certainly incorporate that into our future decisions and actions and so on.

Not everybody sees that particular aspect. There's flattery and praise going on to the wise. And if the wise allow flattery and praise to deflect them from opposing oppression, from countering oppression, from talking against oppression, they are going to be rendered ineffective.

They're neutralized. And to accept a gift, so you see the parallelism, accepting the gift and accepting this praise in lieu of doing what wisdom dictates. Wisdom says you don't do what you do to be praised of men.

There is all kinds of oppression. We tend to think of oppression in terms of dictators and the Taliban oppressing women and making them wear curtains with welded mask windows in them and that kind of thing over their head. But oppression takes a lot of forms.

There is a lot of social oppression. There is a lot of family oppression. Oppression is just another way of saying somebody is putting pressure on.

You know, the root is the same. Oppression, oppress, is from press upon. It's to press upon, to place pressure on.

That's what oppression is. So do we have oppression? Do we face pressure? Do people exert various forms of overt and subtle pressure on us to conform or to go along or to accept? Is there pressure to accept certain things that wisdom says are not right? I read, my dad brought an article from Dave Hunt in the Berean Call. That's a very worthwhile newsletter, by the way, if you get the chance to subscribe to the Berean Call.

I get the secondhand copies from my folks. But Dave Hunt was the author of the book *The Seduction of Christianity and Escape into the Light*. His particular service to the body of Christ has been to point out the inroads of New Age thinking and of Eastern mysticism and demon influence into the church and wrapped in finery and wrapped in clothes of legitimacy a lot of demonically inspired thinking has crept into the church.

Meditation and visualization and the use of yoga. You know, they've got Christian yoga now where you're supposed to assume the position and contemplate your navel and think deep thoughts about God. Well, these are just opening the doors to demonic influence and demonic oppression.

And Dave Hunt has pointed these things out. But in a recent issue of the Berean Call, from just the last few weeks, of course you have the looming large in everyone's mind is this disaster of

September 11th, this criminal act. And one of the things that you heard almost immediately from the president on down is, well, you've got to distinguish between these Islamic fanatics who commit terrorism in the name of Allah and Islam in general and the Muslims in general who are a peace loving people.

And, you know, they're just another kind of religion. And, you know, don't hate the Muslims and don't be against Islam. Just be against the terrorists and the abusers of Islam.

Well, that's an understandable sentiment and it is important to be sure you know who the real enemy is. But if you examine, and this is Dave Hunt's point, go back and look at Islam. Go back and read the Quran.

Look at Muhammad and his followers back in the 6th century when he was holding forth. It has always been a religion of oppression. It spreads itself with the sword.

Muhammad and his followers killed thousands of people. When Muhammad died, and Dave Hunt points all this out in his article, when Muhammad died, the Arabian countries over there thought, well, great, we can get rid of this religion that was foisted upon us by Muhammad and his followers. And they tried to get away from that religion, get out from underneath it.

And tens of thousands of holy warriors came back in and slaughtered and wiped out entire towns and villages and brought them back under the oppression of Islam by violence and by blood. There are dozens of lines in the Quran that talk about the fact that, present the faith of Islam to this guy, and if he doesn't accept it, kill him. The infidels who reject the truth of Islam are to be killed.

Now the Word of God talks about severe consequences for those who do not trust God, who do not conform themselves to God. But God is the one who perpetrates. We are not told to go out and slay, witness to somebody and speak the truth in love.

If they don't accept it, kill them. Let me win your hearts and minds or I'll burn your huts down and then kill you. But this is the... And he also makes the point that, yes, there are many, many people in Islam, just like there's lots of people who are in the Masons who don't really know what Masonry is and what it stands for.

They don't get up to be a 32nd degree Mason and know all the goofball weird stuff that's in Masonry. There's a lot of people in the LDS church, the Mormons, who don't really know what Mormons believe and don't understand the doctrinal quote, unquote, foundations of that cult. There are a lot of Catholics who don't really know what the Catholic church teaches and believes.

And there are a lot of Muslims who don't really understand. And if they did, they would not subscribe to the harsher tenets of Islam. But the fact remains, the religion is founded on violence.

It spreads itself by violence. And don't be so quick to say, oh, it's only the fanatics and the terrorists that I am against. Islam has as its stated goal to take over the world.

Well, this is what I don't like about communism. Communism isn't content to just be, well, our little country, we want to be communists. We want to be socialists.

We want to follow the teachings of Marx and Lenin and so on. So we're just going to do that here. You can go over there and do something else if you want to.

No. Marxism and communism, what is their goal? We have got to propagate and spread and take over the world. Well, there's a lot of us who don't like being taken over and don't want to be communists.

And so we oppose and shoot and kill the communists. It is the same with Islam. Islam is the religious version of the social religion of Marxism and of communism.

And anything that says, I'm going to take over the world is something to watch because it's got the seeds of evil. And I will tell you this, even Christianity, when it takes a form, when it becomes no longer Christianity but a religion that says, we are going to take over the world, is dangerous and is to be watched because it has got the seeds of evil. God never says in the Bible, go therefore into all the world and take it over.

That's not the Great Commission. But there are Christians who misunderstand and think Christianity must take over the world. These are your amillennials and your postmillennials who think we've got to bring in the kingdom and win the world for Christ and then he'll come and be the king.

We'll do the work and then he'll just come down and preside. Well, anything that says it's going to take over the world, I mean, just read your comic books. Look at your old serials from the 40s and 50s.

Anybody that says they're going to take over the world, they're the bad guy. Well, guess what? Islam is a religion that is dedicated to taking over the world. And they're doing a pretty good job.

They're even trying to, I understand, carve out pieces of China and things now. And look at the result. Look at the countries where Islam is predominant.

What kind of freedom, what kind of opportunity do people have in those countries? How free are women to pursue an education or a profession or to just live a normal human life? So do we want Muslims coming over to the United States and foisting that religion on us? Why do you think black power back in the late 60s and 70s embraced Islam? Why do you think Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali? Why do you think Lou Alcindor changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar? Why do you think those two guys at the Olympics in 1968 that won the gold and silver

medals put their gloved fists into the air? What is that? That's Islam. People who feel like they're not in charge want to be in charge and embrace that religion. So I think the article that they've put forward as usual is a good wake-up call for believers to pay attention and don't be led astray by somebody just saying, oh, well, you know, let's be wise.

Let's be perceptive and thoughtful and separate the extremist terrorists from Islam, making it sound like, well, a foolish person would just be bigoted and hate all of the Muslims or resist all of the Nation of Islam and all of that. Who's the leader of the Nation of Islam? Farrakhan and his ilk. He's the big Nation of Islam guy.

And read some of his stuff if you want to find out what form Islam is taking among the black community in this country. Anyway, oppression tries to subvert the wise by praise, by flattery, by saying, well, you know, you're exactly right and that's really important. And oppression will just find a way around the wise.

It will praise them as it goes, bribe them as it goes, give them a gift, settle with them out of court and go right on. Why is this in this particular spot in the flow of thought? We've been talking about thinking about the end of life rather than the beginning, thinking about the house of mourning rather than the house of feasting, listening to wisdom rather than laughter. It doesn't mean you can never laugh or that you can never be in the house of feasting, but the sober mind will take this to heart.

You're not going to make a career out of pursuing pleasure. You're not going to live from celebration to celebration. There are people who live for their social life.

There are people who form churches and the church is built around social life. That's what the church is. Nothing wrong with social life.

It's great. If it is something that accompanies salvation. They talk about those things which accompany salvation.

We are convinced of better things of you brethren, things that accompany salvation. Well, salvation is deliverance. What accompanies deliverance? Deliverance is the main thing and everything else accompanies it.

How are we delivered out of this present evil age? We're not delivered by fellowship. We're not delivered by wonderful music. We're not delivered by mirth and gladness.

Nothing wrong with those things. I love music. I love mirth.

I love fellowship. But that's not at the core of our relationship with God. That's not the core of our Christianity.

And if it ever becomes the core, you're going to be easily misled by anyone who comes up and

praises. Anybody who says, oh, you know, this is great. Anybody who gives a gift.

Who gives you something and you put your wisdom in a box and you don't apply it anymore. That's what's being spoken of here. Oppression will flatter the wise.

Oppression will praise the wise. Oppression is not going to come out and show all of its colors. It's going to try to win by flattery and by giving gifts.

It's only when that fails. They tried that in Russia. They tried to cultivate their wise men and get them to go along with the communist thing.

And then when that failed, then they had to start locking them up. And you have Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the Gulag Archipelago and that kind of thing. Verse 8, the end of a thing is better than its beginning.

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Well, the end of something is... you can take that two different ways. Does it just mean that it came to a conclusion or is this emphasis on the outcome of something? The outcome of something is better than the inception of something.

This goes back to better is the day of death than the day of birth. But the thing, the end of a thing here, of course the word thing is a word that we've seen before and that is davar. And the root meaning of davar is word.

So some people would say, well, the end of the sermon is better than the beginning. It's better when it's over with than when it's starting out. The end of a speech, the end of a word is better than its beginning.

And you can think of this in terms of the words that are spoken. I was taught in homiletics class that you always want to have a real strong beginning when you have a sermon. This is why people generally open with a joke or open with something that makes everyone laugh and settles them with a comfortable, warm feeling because that gets everybody feeling good and receptive to what you think you're about to say.

But what Solomon says is, what is the result? You can craft a great speech. You can craft a fine word. And it sounds good, especially at the beginning.

But what is the outcome? Does it produce a result or not? He's using catchy words and word plays and bringing up aphorisms that were common in Israel. And a catchy phrase is great. I've thought about this many times.

There are people who are so good at crafting a sermon, and I wish I was as good as they are at the design and the structure and the flow that summarizes the content. But the question is, I've heard lots and lots of really well-crafted sermons, but what really matters is, did it do something to me? Did I come away with something that makes a difference? Because hearing fine-sounding

words... Paul said, if I speak with the tongue of men and angels and have not love, I'm just like somebody banging on the cymbals. What is the result? And this is a Sunday.

There are thousands of well-crafted sermons, three points in a prayer, alliterating bullets, nice outlines and all that. But whether it's well-crafted or not, what is the end result? What happens as a result? This is the theme Solomon is addressing in this section of Ecclesiastes. The end of a thing is better than its beginning.

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. You can start something with a lot of gusto. You can have all kinds of good intentions.

You can be gung-ho and motivated at the beginning. That's the proud in spirit. It's the patient in spirit who persist and reach the end, who implement what they hear that are going to reap the benefit.

Verse 9, Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. Anger is very seldom a productive emotion. Anger clouds judgment.

Anger causes us to speak without thinking, causes us to act without thinking. Anger is usually the top of the volcano and the lava that's spewing forth from that volcano is arrogance and self-centeredness and a sense of outrage that something has been done to me, something has offended me. I have had my boundaries crossed.

I have had my standards transgressed. And anger, unless it is genuine righteous indignation because God's standards have been transgressed and God's boundaries have been crossed, most anger in human beings is a sense of outrage and offense based in arrogance and self-centeredness. Anger rests in the bosom of fools.

We saw in our scripture reading this morning that wisdom rests in the heart of the wise. It finds a place of permanence. Well, fools.

And there's no better place to see this. This section has been talking about fools in the house of celebration and fools laughing like the crackling thorns and all that. If you've spent much time amongst the happy hour crowd, as most of us that spend any time in the service have at one time or another, you know how quickly mirth and goodwill and a fun drinking bout can turn ugly because alcohol tends to remove someone's inhibitions and the veneer and the superficial facade that people put on.

And underneath, all of the bile and the bitterness and the resentment that they have comes to the surface. I've been at many a table during happy hour or out on the town where everybody was hail fellow, well met, and after about the third round of drinks, somebody turns ugly. And underneath all of this laughter and mirth, you start finding the bile and the bitterness and the inhibitions are gone and people say what they really think.

I've had to depart the area. I've probably told you that story before, but I was out with a guy, a lieutenant in Okinawa, and we went to where the Okinawans go. And I was just out to relax after being in the field and coming back and getting cleaned up.

We'd been up at Camp Hanson for several days. We came back and we thought, well, instead of going to the Officer's Club, let's go out and soak up some culture. So we went out to a place where the Okinawans go and there weren't any servicemen in there.

Well, this guy, after about two drinks, just started getting ugly and started talking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and we whipped you once and we can whip you again. And I thought, you know, you've got some serious problems here. And I said, you say one more thing like that, because he was talking, he was insulting the waiter.

And I said, you say one more thing and I'm going to leave you to your fate. I'm not sticking around here and getting a knife stuck in me because of your foolishness. Well, he just kept on.

And I left. And I half expected him to, you know, the next thing we heard, he'd either be in the hospital or the morgue. But I guess he didn't have anybody to talk to and so he didn't say anything else.

But there is an ugliness in the heart of a fool and it resides there. Anger finds a home in the bosom of fools. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry.

We have to control anger. We have to keep our wisdom in play. And anger can cause us to do many destructive and foolish things.

Do not say... Now here's one that we can all identify with. Do not say, why were the former days better than these? For you to not inquire wisely concerning this. What is one of the things that makes one bitter and makes one angry? It's to see what we consider to be deterioration.

Oh, it's not like it was in the old core. Back when I was at the Naval Academy, they'd say, well, back when I was a plebe, that's when wooden ships and iron men or iron ships and wooden men or whatever. And, you know, back in the good old days.

And what we forget is, it's like old Barbra Streisand's song there, what's too painful to remember, we choose to forget. And so when we think of the good old days, we just think about the highlights, and we don't think about all the negative sides of it. Do not say, why were the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

Don't get stuck in auld lang syne. Don't get stuck in nostalgia and reminiscence. Why? You're looking back.

You're supposed to be looking forward. What are we supposed to be keeping an eye on? The end of things. The day of death.

What are you going to do with the time that remains to you? Don't just sit there dreaming about days gone by, and oh, I have a record up here I played a couple of days ago that's got the college songs, the Halls of Ivy, and oh, you know, when our hearts were young and gay, and of course you can't say that anymore, but talking about the wonderful times in college when we were hail fellow well met, and there used to be a song a couple of decades ago, those were the days, my friend. We thought they'd never end. We'd sing forever in a day, and then it's all full of pathos, and oh, whatever happened to those good old days? Now I go by the old drinking tavern, and there's nobody there.

Well, do not say, why were the former days better than these? You can't do anything about the former days. That's like going back to the day of birth. Look ahead.

Plan ahead. Take advantage of the time that remains. The wise woman is going to take and build up her house.

She's not going to use her hands to tear it down and say, well, this house is not as good as the one I had before. You do not inquire wisely concerning this, and notice it is the inquiry that is faulty. You do not inquire wisely.

You're going back and saying, well, how can we get back to those good old days? The way inquiring minds are not looking back. Inquiring minds are looking forward. How can I make this day better than yesterday? How can I do a better job of using what God has given me today? And that's what verse 11 goes on to say.

Wisdom is good with an inheritance and profitable to those who see the sun. Boy, if this doesn't have almost every vocabulary word that we've seen in the first six and a half chapters of Ecclesiastes. Wisdom is good for what? Tovah chakmah im nakhalah.

And im means with. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. Wisdom is good when it results in an inheritance.

You're not deflected. You're not bribed. You're not flattered away.

You're not distracted. You're not looking back and harking back to times gone by. You're looking forward to the inheritance.

Inheritance is future. If you possess it, it's no longer an inheritance. Now it's a possession.

Inheritance is what you're going to get at some future time. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. An inheritance is that which is permanent.

This is the opposite of vapor. And what else does the verse say? It is yetter. It is profitable to those who see the sun.

Who are those who see the sun? Well, seeing the sun means you're still in this life. You haven't died yet. You're somewhere between the day of birth and the day of death.

How are you going to find the prophet? What's the first question Solomon asks at the beginning of the book? What prophet is there to a man under the sun? Well, this tells us that wisdom with an inheritance is profitable to those who see the sun. It is an advantage. This is not yetron.

This is yeter, which is a related word. It's from the same root. And it means advantage.

It means something left over. Sometimes it means to excess or overmuch. It's what overflows the top of the cup.

It's that that goes beyond. It's what is left over. This is really just another form of the same word, yetron.

So what prophet is there to a man during his days under the sun? Wisdom with an inheritance is profit to those who see the sun. So there is a prophet. Of all the things that are profitless, laughter crackling like thorns, pursuing earthly riches, finding confidence in accomplishments, or seeing good in your labor, being satisfied with the work that you do, Solomon says it's havel, it's vapor.

What is it that is yetron? Or in this case, yeter. The Y and the T and the R are the main consonants there. Yetron, yeter, same root.

Wisdom with an inheritance. That's why hope is the motivating virtue of the Christian life. Faith, hope, and love.

Hope is the confident expectation that there is a return on the investment of faith and of pursuing the plan of God, of striving to enter by the narrow door. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. It is profitable to those who see the sun.

Wisdom is a defense as money is a defense. So we're comparing spiritual things to earthly things. People feel like the great security in life is to have financial resources, to be able to pay for a lawyer if you get sued, to be able to cover an expense, or to be able to cover medical bills, or whatever might come up.

Money is a defense. Whatever comes up, you buy what you need. You purchase what you require.

You sustain yourself with finances. It's a defense. Well, in the spiritual realm, wisdom is your defense.

Wisdom meets every exigency. Wisdom secures you a place in the eternal future. Wisdom secures the inheritance that lasts, that goes beyond the grave.

But money is all limited to what you can do under the sun. You can fix circumstances, and you can solve concrete problems in this life with money, or supposedly solve them. But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

Now, this has to be some kind of life other than physical life, right? Because you're already alive. You're already seeing the sun to acquire the wisdom. So what does it mean when it says wisdom gives life to those who have it? Well, we think about the wisdom personified over in Proverbs 3. Remember the speech where wisdom stands on the street corners and calls out to the young man as he travels? Proverbs 3, My son, do not forget my law.

Let your heart keep my commands. For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you.

Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. And so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

There's your name that is better than perfume, better than ointment. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. And a lot of people take this literally, but this is talking about the spiritual realm. How do you measure success? How do you measure inheritance? How do you measure fruit and profit? Well, by analogy in physical terms, it is health in your flesh and strength in your bones.

It is full barns and full wine vats. You have everything you need personally. You have everything you need in your circumstances.

You are prosperous and well furnished, both internally and externally. And that is the promise of God to those who secure wisdom and do not turn loose of it in this life. That is the means of securing the Yitrone, the profit that Solomon is talking about.

The big question is, and this is so often the theme in Scripture, what is it we are going to pursue? What is it we think about when we start out a day? Are we thinking about the end of the day and whether or not we will have used the time wisely, whether we will have operated in faith, whether we will have made progress, borne any spiritual fruit, or do we think, well, I've got this list of four things I need to get done today, and so I'm going to go out and run my errands, and I'm going to get this done, and I'm going to mow, and I'm going to build, and I'm going to clean, and I'm going to do my job, and I'm going to do this, that, and the other. Often it is at the end of the day that we

realize that we didn't really use our time efficiently, or the things that we did, we didn't really do as a reflection of faith. We didn't incorporate our spiritual identity into what we did.

And even though they got accomplished and may have even been done successfully and well, we didn't actually bear any spiritual fruit because maybe we had a sour attitude or maybe we just completely were oblivious to who we are and why we're here. Never gave God a thought. Never stopped to check our attitudes of heart and whether or not what we were doing reflected biblical priorities and biblical methods of operation.

So that's what Solomon says. You have got to stop and think. Listen to the rebuke of the wise rather than the song of fools.

Don't just be distracted with pleasant circumstances, with euphonious sounds generated by fools. There is a babble of noise in our American culture generated by the press, generated by the entertainment industry, generated by people around us who reflect and follow that general current of culture and society. And if we are lulled to sleep by that noise and we don't hear the rebuke of the wise, we're going to waste our time.

We're going to reduce whatever profit we should have had when we go into the eternal future. And it's just a constant challenge. We fail this test so many times and it's hard to remember with everything that's going on.

But the end of a word is better than its beginning, a word or a thing. The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. The proud in spirit has all kinds of good intentions, but the patient in spirit brings them to pass.

Don't say, why were the former days better than these? You're not inquiring wisely. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. Look forward, not back.

Wisdom with an inheritance is profitable to those who see the sun. Wisdom is a defense like money is a defense. But don't pursue money in this life because the excellence of knowledge is that it gives life to those who have it.

It transcends. Money can fix things. You can buy what you want.

You can get your groceries. I get gadgets with my money sometimes, solve certain problems that I have on how to make sure I can hear music wherever I go. But the excellence of knowledge is, and this is really saying, here is the excellence of knowledge.

If you want to know something that's really excellent, this is it. Wisdom gives life to those who have it. That's the most important thing you can know.

Wisdom gives life to those who have it. Well, this is a good place for us to stop because the next verse, consider the work of God. Who can make straight what He has made crooked? This harks

back to something we saw in chapter 1. What is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be filled.

Remember that? Well, now we have a little advance on that piece of information because it is God that has made the crooked crooked. So, what aspect of God's work are we to consider? Well, that will be where we resume next time. But in closing, if there is something that we learned from the first half of this chapter, it is that we are responsible and accountable for what we think.

We have wisdom. And to he who has, more will be given. If wisdom finds a resting place in our soul, as we saw in Proverbs 14, then God is going to be able to produce in us that profitable work that goes beyond the setting of the sun.

It will secure for us eternal dwellings. It will secure for us an eternal inheritance. If it is superficial, if it comes and goes, if it is like the crackling of the thorns under the pot, we will end up outside the door wishing we were inside, not even with a place to sit, much less an inheritance of our own.

So, it is a sobering thought, but it is encouraging to know that we still have time. We are still under the sun. We have the opportunity to take whatever time is left and invest it in things that last.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the admonition of your word, the constant reminder that we are here not to please ourselves but to fulfill your purpose, to fulfill your plan for our lives and to be prepared for that which is to come. We ask that God the Holy Spirit will remind us as we go through the days.

We are so easily distracted. We are so easily flattered and we are given gifts in the world that lead us astray, but we pray that your Spirit will be clearly heard in our souls and that we will constantly return to the wisdom that secures for us an inheritance, an inheritance that reflects your glory and fulfills your purpose. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.