

01-11-11b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now. Janelle asked a really good question over the break with regard to our scripture reading this morning in Psalm 41. When you get down to verse 11 and David says, he says in verse 10, Thou, O Lord, be gracious to me and raise me up that I may repay them.

By this I know that Thou art pleased with me because my enemy does not shout in triumph over me. But he says, be gracious to me and raise me up that I may repay them. It says in the New American Standard and I think the same in the New King James.

And I had mentioned without going into much detail that that's not really the sense here of some sort of retaliation. And the verb here is shalem, S-H-A-L-E-M, which has the same radicals as shalom, the word that means peace or is a good greeting. But the radical form, the primary form of shalem means to be finished or to be completed.

It's used this way, for example, in First Kings 7.51 where it says, Thus all the work that King Solomon performed in the house of the Lord was shalem, it was finished, it was complete. He brought in the things that his father dedicated and so on. In the pale form, which is what we have here in Psalm 41.11, it has the idea of being fulfilled or complete.

And again you find an example of this in First Kings 9.25, Three times in a year Solomon offered burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he built to the Lord, burning incense with them on the altar which was before the Lord. So he finished the house. The issue was resolved.

It was a long ongoing project and with the offering of these offerings, it was, and he began this memorial sacrifice that he did three times a year, sort of in commemoration of the completion of this great task that his father had undertaken. And he finished it. He resolved, it has the idea of resolution, of bringing something to a completed state, there's no loose ends.

And it has the idea of giving recompense, meeting out a just penalty or reward. It doesn't so much have the idea that you're penalizing, it doesn't have a negative connotation, but it can include that. For example in 1 Samuel 24.19, the statement is made, if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the Lord therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.

And of course in 1 Samuel 24 you have the conversation going on between Saul and David. Saul is sort of apologizing and he says to David, you are more righteous than I. You have dealt well with me, I have dealt wickedly with you. You have declared today that you have done good to me so that the Lord delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me.

For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? Will he let him go away unpunished? But the idea here is may the Lord therefore reward you with good in return. And the idea is that because of an issue that there is some treatment that is due, but whatever is done should be just.

It should be fair, it should reflect integrity, it should reflect character, it should reflect justice.

And so when David prays and he says, deliver me so that I may respond to them with propriety, respond to them in an appropriate way so that I may resolve the issue with them appropriately, so that the issue may be settled is the idea. Just like the house of the Lord was completed, it was settled, it was finished. So that I can dispense with that.

It isn't something that comes back and haunts you. You don't come back and keep going back through verses 5 through 9 over and over again and I can't believe they did that to me, what did I ever do to deserve this, look how hard I am working to do this, that and the other. It's settled.

Deliver me, he says, deliver me so that I may be gracious to me, raise me up so that I can settle with them, so that I can finish with them. I can respond in an appropriate way to them. There are perfectly good words for retaliate and revenge and they are not found here.

This is shalem, it means to fulfill, to be fulfilled, to cause to fulfill. It even has the idea in the PL to restore, to bring to a previous preferable state is one of the meanings of this word that you find in Job chapter 8 and verse 6. If you are pure and upright, surely now he will rouse himself for you and restore your righteous estate. So it's used to repay or to make restitution in some contexts such as Exodus 21.34 where if you have an animal that falls into a pit and the owner of the animal suffers a loss, the owner of the pit shall make restitution.

He shall give money to its owner and the dead animal shall become his. He shall requite him, he shall make things good, restore things to a previous equitable state is the idea of shalem. Keep in mind shalom behind shalem, it's that idea.

So it is a great thing to be given the ability by God and you see this as a New Testament theme as well where Paul says, God has reconciled us to himself, should we not be reconciled one to another? Talking about Jews and Gentiles and that we have been forgiven by God, we should forgive one another. If we cannot forgive one another, we ourselves are not forgiven. So David in looking to his relationship with God first and acknowledging his sin and asking for God's mercy, God's power, God's forgiveness, he recognizes his own powerlessness.

He says, I can't raise myself up from this, you have got to raise me up so that I can requite in a just and honorable way, in a way that's pleasing to God these people. Well, what is the way that's just and honorable and pleasing in God's sight? Is it retaliation and revenge? Is it getting back at them? Is it vindication at their expense? It isn't. It is love those who hate you.

Love your enemy. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you, the New Testament tells us.

This is what pleases God. This is what is going to enable God to be pleased and the enemy will not be shouting in triumph, it says in the New American Standard. Not going to be in the long run

who is going to be the more admirable, who is actually triumphed in that difficult situation.

It is the one who maintained his integrity and pleased God, not the one that inflicted a harm on another. And that is the one who will be upheld in integrity and set in God's presence forever. The presence of God is not an automatic reward that comes to all believers.

The presence of God both in this life and in the next, being in close proximity, sitting at table with Him is a privilege. It is a reward to the faithful. It is a reward to those who diligently seek Him.

If you seek Him, He will be found by you, the Scripture says. So, it was an excellent question and I'm glad to get the chance to elaborate on that because sometimes you find these passages in the Old Testament, especially where it seems a little bit vindictive, like, raise me up so that I can slay them, send them to these sons of Belial, send them where they belong, crush them. But that is certainly not the case in this chapter.

Let's return now to Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 7. As I said, there is something of a non sequitur and I do not claim to have solved the puzzle of the ages here, but you can see that while there is not a real tight semantic flow of thought here, there is not a great segue from verse 6 to verse 7. It does appear as though something is missing here. You've been talking about the fool, you've been talking about the crackling of the thorns under the pot and how intransigent, how insubstantial and the fool is. This is not where substance is to be found.

You want to be listening to the rebuke of the wise. You want to have your heart in the house of mourning like the wise. You see the contrast between wisdom and foolishness in verses 4-6.

Obviously, being wise is desirable. You want to not just go in the ignorance is bliss mode to the house of gladness. So then when you get to verse 7, we continue to see a contrast.

You have wisdom and foolishness right there. How can you go from one to the other? How can you avoid, in other words, becoming these who occupy themselves with empty laughter, who are celebrating when there are serious issues at stake? How can you avoid being the nettles under the kettles? Well, do not take to yourself ill-gotten gain. Maintain your integrity.

Don't compromise. Don't get over. Don't take advantage of a loophole.

One of the things that I remember from my teenage years when I was listening to Bob Thiem's teen series, he had a lot to say about the wrong crowd and about how so many young people are what he called herd-bound. You're not comfortable unless you're with the herd, unless you look the same, sound the same, are accepted by them, are found adequate when measured by their standards and so forth, and what a trap this is and how difficult it is to shake free from peer pressure. One of the principles that he taught and illustrated from many places in the Word of God is that you really find out what you're like when you're alone.

A lot of people do fine as long as they're in the company of others. Single people sometimes

come home after a week of work or something and they've got to go out. They've been around people all week, but they've got to go back out.

They don't want to find themselves in solitude. It's still considered something of a faux pas. If you go to a restaurant and eat by yourself, nobody wants to be at the table set for one.

You're thinking, well, people are going to see the big L on my forehead. Loser. Can't find a date.

Can't find a companion. Nobody wants to eat with you. And people don't want that.

They want to be with someone, and yet it is a great test of who we are and what we are when we're alone. Do things change when we're alone, when people are not around, when people are not looking? Do we fall into sin? There are people who can't maintain their morality when they're alone. There are people who spend hours when nobody else is around surfing the Internet looking at stuff that they should not in the male category.

Men are quite subject to this. It's a big problem even in Christian circles, even among people who are in the quote-unquote ministry and people who are in seminary. Huge problems with people who do fine as long as there are social conventions.

As long as someone is looking, you think, well, I would not want to be ill thought of. And that is the structure that holds their character together, is not wanting to be ill thought of. But when they're alone, well, the wife is out of town for a week, or I'm here at the office and everyone has left, and so here we go.

To get something that you think is going to satisfy or that you think is desirable in an illicit way, this is Oshek. This is when you are taking illicit advantage. The constraints are not there.

The oversight is not there. The watchful eyes and the observation of others is not there. And it is a true principle that Bob taught in the teen tapes.

You find out what you're like when you're alone. What is it that holds you together? Do you function the same when no one's looking, when there's no hidden camera? It's just you. Are you the same person when you're alone as you are when people are looking? Are you just as scrupulous in your record-keeping and in the calculations of your tax form if you are pretty sure you're not going to be audited as when you're pretty sure you are going to be audited? Do you stop at a stoplight in the middle of the night and wait for the thing to turn green, even though there's nobody in any direction, there's no law enforcement around? Do you sit at the light because it's the law, because it's the right thing to do? And I personally do feel pretty foolish at 3 in the morning, sitting at a long red light especially.

And a lot of times at night they change the timing and if you're on a side street waiting to get onto a main thoroughfare, you could sit there for two and a half, three minutes waiting for the light to

change and you think, you know, I might as well be in the middle of the Mojave Desert here. Why not just blow on through the light? Well, it has to do with integrity, it has to do with what are you like when you're alone. Ill-gotten gain, if you take advantage because there is an advantage to be gained, the safety locks are off, the observation is not there, you hope that your children recognize this principle and that when the parents are away, they observe the same rules as they do when you're there.

They don't say, hey, mom and dad are going to be gone for two hours, where are the matches? Let's see if we can burn holes in napkins in the living room or something. I only mention that because I did that once. Well, I was fascinated.

I had been to a Thanksgiving dinner or something and all the kids were at one table in another room and all the adults were in the main room and one of my cousins that I hardly ever saw was showing off, there were candles on the table and they took their napkin and held it over the candle and it burned a little hole in the middle. Then they blew out the flame and I thought, boy, that is really neat. I was very young.

So then at some point not long thereafter when we were back home and I was babysitting my younger siblings, I thought, boy, I want to find out. My mom and dad would probably be all disappointed in me, but I wondered if that really worked and so I tried it out. But the thing, our napkins seemed to be more flammable than our napkins really burst into flame.

Maybe they were cheaper or something, but the thing just surprised me and got all out of hand. But it was so wispy. It burned in the air before it ever hit the deck, but it scared me to death and I did only do that once.

But this is how little kids burn their house down. They do things when people are not looking that they wouldn't do when someone is looking. And it's easy to forget that of course the Lord is observing us all the time.

It depends on how real God is to us I guess. But this is the idea in verse 7. If you recognize that wisdom is better than foolishness, that the way to achieve and to lay hold of something that is permanent and lasting in this life, which is the theme of Ecclesiastes, is through the path of wisdom, then the last thing you want to do is lose your wisdom. You don't want wisdom to desert you in this critical situation, this pressure situation, this situation where you might be in Psalm 41 and people are after you or are disappointed in you or critical of you.

Well, if there is an opening, if there is some way that seems right to you, that seems like it's going to give you an advantage, just remember verse 7. Ill-gotten gain will make foolish. Holey. This is David with the spit running down his beard.

It's not just becoming a fool. It's embarrassing. It's humiliating.

I'm sure that if there was any part of David's life that he could eradicate out of the eternal record, this would be one of them, probably not the only. But certainly one is playing crazy in Goliath's hometown, walking around like a nutcase. Well, Solomon says, you want to know how to get to that place? Just lose sight of who you are and why you're here.

Ill-gotten gain will make foolish the wise, and what is given, what you get out of that, will make a ruin of your heart. It doesn't destroy your heart. Destroy means it's gone.

It makes a shambles of it. It's like the pictures of the trade center. It is a shame to think of what was there and what has been lost.

The ruins are a monument to what used to be. I could give you other places where Höl is used in this sense. We saw the same thing in a noun form in Ecclesiastes 2.2 where he said, I turn my mind to consider wisdom and madness and folly.

Well, the madness there is Höl, at least in the English. Job 12.17 says he makes counselors, depending on which version you read, he turns them backward or makes them barefoot, and he makes fools of judges. Making fools of the judges is Höl.

A judge is the one who is supposed to have the wisdom to determine what's right and wrong in all of these situations that are brought before them. Even those who are wise, or wise in their own eyes or considered wise by others, are made fools in this case. Isaiah 44.25 says, I stretch out the heavens by myself and I'm spreading out the earth all alone, causing the omens or the signs of boasters to fail, making fools out of diviners and causing wise men to draw back, and turning their knowledge into foolishness, confirming the word of his servant and performing the purpose of his messengers.

Even in the New Testament it says, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. The wisdom of God makes the wisdom of men look foolish, is the idea. It looks as though they have taken leave of their senses.

So this is the idea here. It isn't just becoming the Kaseel or the Kaseelim, the foolish ones. It is having your reason desert you.

I think it came from Halal in the sense that people who got engaged in worship would sometimes get into sort of a hysterics or kind of like the charisma movement today where you sometimes have people who kind of get unhinged in their worship. The PAL is the intensive and you sort of go too far. You started out worshiping but then you kind of get into ecstatic utterance and you kind of lose your grip on reality.

It is sort of the background for that. So now in verse 8, the ill-gotten gain makes foolish the wise. What is given makes a ruin of the heart.

Then he says, the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. And then my translation here is, a long spirit is better than a tall spirit. That is the literal rendering of this Hebrew phrase.

The outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. A long spirit is better than a tall spirit. Now you think, how on earth did we get from that to what we have in the New King James or in the New American Standard where you have patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit or patience is better than pride.

Well let's begin at the beginning. The outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. Now the word outcome here is the word acharith.

A-C-H-A-R-I-T-H. Acharith. Achar means what comes after, what follows.

We have seen this word a couple of times already when we have seen verses that said, who can show a man what will come after him? Or he works and gains all of this substance and then he must give it to the one who comes after him. That's achar or acharith. So what comes after a matter, and the word matter here is davar, D-A-B-A-R, which is often translated word.

You could bridge that gap between word and matter with the idea of issue, an issue. An issue is usually spoken about and so words are used, divrim are used, but the outcome of a matter or the outcome of a word, there's kind of a locus of meaning there, an issue, the outcome of an issue is better than its beginning. And the word for better there of course is from tov.

Tov, acharith, davar. Tov or good or better, the outcome of a thing or a matter from the preposition main and then you have rashid, but rashid, first word in the Bible, in the beginning. Rosh means head and it has the idea of the origination, the beginning of something.

So the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. Now why would that be? What if something is evil? What if it's an evil thing? Is the ending of it better than the beginning? It would be better to not have it reach fruition. This of course is a statement in context here where he's saying, and it's amplified in the second phrase, a long spirit is better than a tall spirit.

You have ruach here described with two different adjectives. And the erech, e-r-e-k, erech, e-r-e-k, spirit is better than the geba, spirit. G-b-a-h, geba, which is the word that means tall or lifted up or high.

And you can see where the concept of haughty, a haughty spirit or a proud spirit, but we've got a perfectly good word for pride and that's not what's used here. And it's because it's kind of a word picture and it's one of the things that Hebrew is great for. It just paints on a canvas contrasts and things for you by the combinations of words.

And so you have a geba ruach compared with an erech ruach. Tov erech ruach, mgeba ruach. And the erech ruach means long or it has the idea of slow, something that's long and drawn out,

a drawn out spirit.

It's long or slow, something that endures and lasts and this is where the concept of patience comes from. But I like the literal translation because it gives you a physical picture of it. You've got the spirit that's standing tall at the beginning, but can you look back and see the spirit that lasted and endured at the end? It's such a great concept that's repeated over and over in scripture.

You had a need of patience so that after you have suffered a little while you will receive the promises, Peter says. Paul says, by faith and patience we inherit. And you don't want to be the one that was speaking the great swelling words of intention at the beginning.

Oh, I'll, like Peter, Lord I'll be with you, though all others may desert you, I'll be there. He was standing tall at the beginning of that awful day, but it's looking at the end. Did you have not the tall spirit, but the long spirit, the spirit that endured, that was consistent and faithful all the way through? A long spirit is better than a tall spirit.

And this sheds light on the statement of the first part. The outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. Why? It doesn't mean that the end is always better than the beginning, but when you evaluate something, you can look at its beginning and what the intentions were.

People start out with the best of intentions, but things don't always, you know, they oftentimes gang or glee, as the phrase goes. You measure things by its result. Many people resolve on January the first that they are going to do things in the year, but it's better to look on December 31st and see if you had the long spirit that actually came through and lasted.

And this reflects back on verse 7 as well, because ill-gotten gain and this acquisition of something that is given is a short-term fix. We tend to think, well, I've got a problem and here's a quick solution. Here's a thing, it's not quite legit, it's kind of taking advantage, it's a little bit under the table.

I wouldn't do this if people were watching, but here's the quick fix. This will answer the need of the moment. Well, you can justify and you can rationalize and you can try to stand tall at the beginning and say, well, I'm doing this for all the right reasons.

But does it reflect patience? Does it reflect endurance? Does it reflect those qualities of integrity that God is going to be pleased with? We have a great combination of ideas here in thinking about this verse. The end or outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. In 1 Kings 20 verse 11, let not the one putting on his armor boast like the one taking it off.

You have the verb there for boast, it's halal. Let not the one putting on his armor boast like the one taking it off. Let's talk to the guy that's already been to the battle and has come back and he's taken off his armor and let's find out what he did.

Let's not talk to the guy that's in the replacement battalion that's just put on his flak jacket and he's fixing to go forth and he says, well, I'll get those dirty rascals, I'm going to do this, that and the other and I'll march forward and never waver and I'll take the hill. Let's talk to the guy that's taking off his armor and see how he did. Let not the one putting on his armor boast like the one taking it off.

1 Kings 20 verse 11. In Job chapter 8 and verse 7, one of the friends is talking and he says in verse 6, if you are pure and upright, surely now he, God would rouse himself for you and restore your righteous estate. Though your beginning were insignificant yet your end would increase greatly.

So divine favor would be evidenced by what God does for you in the end even though you had a humble beginning. It's not the humble beginning, it's what you've attained. We celebrate men like Abraham Lincoln, lots and lots of people read by Firelight, lots and lots of people grew up in a log cabin and split rails and things but Abraham Lincoln is measured as great because of what he did at the end.

He's not admired because he grew up in a cabin, he's admired because he went from that to the presidency and to accomplishing a lot of things that are notable. Well, I think you get the idea here. Deuteronomy chapter 32 and verse 20.

God is talking about the nation of Israel after they came out of Egypt. Verse 17 of Deuteronomy 32. They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they had not known, new gods who came lately whom your fathers did not fear.

You neglected the rock who begot you and forgot the God who gave you birth. This is another case. Why did Israel fall into this trap? It was a quick fix.

It was, you know, let's try something new. The God that brought us out, we're in extremis, we don't have water, we don't have food, we don't have this, we don't have that. We're longing for the leeks and garlicks.

Let's try this other thing. The nations do this and they're prospering. It's a quick fix.

I'll get this illicit gain that I think I'm going to get. You neglected the rock who begot you. You forgot the God who gave you birth.

You've gone to these gods you've not known, new gods who came lately. And then it says the Lord saw this and spurned them because of the provocation of his sons and daughters. And in verse 20 he said, I will hide my face from them.

I will see what their end shall be for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness. The level of your faithfulness will be measured at the end. God says these are sons

in whom is no faithfulness.

Let's see what their end is going to be. They've made me jealous with what is not God. They've provoked me to anger with their idols, so I will make them jealous with those who are not a people.

I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in my anger and burns to the lowest part of Sheol and consumes the earth with its yield. It sets on fire the foundation of the mountains.

This is talking about the fundamental basis of the plan of God for Israel is on fire here. They have endangered their status as God's chosen people and as the nation through whom he's going to manifest his glory by this unfaithfulness. The very foundations of the mountains are on fire.

So there's a great illustration there of the end being what we want to focus on. They had a great start. They marched out of Egypt singing praises.

They came through the Red Sea and sang praises. But it's what happens in the end. How many of them made it into the promised land because they were faithful? Out of 2 million that left Egypt, 2. That's the measure.

What's it going to look like at the end? So he goes on now to say in verse 9, do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. This is my translation now of Ecclesiastes 7 verse 9. Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. And you can see the threads that are woven through this.

We have vocabulary that repeats itself. We've seen wisdom and foolishness. We've seen the wise and the fool.

We've seen now the word spirit. We had up in verse 8, the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. A long or slow spirit, an enduring spirit, is better than a tall spirit, the one that boasts at the beginning.

Do not be troubled in your spirit. How can you make sure that you have that long spirit that is desirable, that's going to allow you to be measured and found satisfactory at the end? Well, do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. I wonder to myself, why doesn't he just say don't be angry? Let not anger have a place in you.

We saw this not long ago. Don't let anger find a place of rest. This is what this verse says.

Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. And we're back to Kisilim. In fact, there's a great sound thing going on here in verse 9, because in Hebrew this is all K's and S's.

Let me see if I can read this to you in Hebrew and approximate something of the original. I don't

claim to be a great verbal reader of Hebrew, but this says, Al t'vahal b'ruach ka l'kaas ki kaas b'kik kasilim. It's all S's and K's.

It really strikes you when you see this. You have b'ruach kak l'kaas ki kaas b'kik kasilim. And what that says, it probably sounds like I'm speaking in tongues, but being troubled in the spirit, the word here that means to be troubled, why doesn't it say don't be angry in your spirit? It says do not be troubled to be angry.

Where does the anger come from? You don't start at anger. You start at trouble. You start at that loop in Psalm 41 verses 5-9 where you keep thinking about the injustice.

You keep thinking about it's not right. It shouldn't be this way. Why are they doing this? It's unjust.

It's unfair. They're whispering. They're plotting.

They're taking my words and twisting them. They're coming to me and deceiving and speaking untruths. They're putting on a pleasing front.

Like the song said back in the 70's, they smile in your face and all the time they're trying to take your place, backstabbers. Remember that song? Well, that song can come back to your mind. This takes place.

It's just part of the human experience. But if you want to not get trapped in anger, because anger will rob you of your wisdom. Anger will send you down the road to the nettles under the kettle.

Don't address the anger. Go back and address the trouble. Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry.

If you tolerate the trouble in your spirit, you're going to have anger as the end result. For anger rests in the bosom of fools. This is Kikos Bekeik.

And there is sort of a word play going on between anger, which is Lakos. To be angry is Lakos. It's Kaas, and then Ion, and then an O, and then an S. Well, the word for anger is Kaas, K-A-A-S.

So you have the verb, the infinitive here, Lakos Kikos. Because anger rests, Bekeik. And this is in the bosom.

Anger is in the bosom of fools. There is no word here for rests. Anger is in, it's Bekeik.

Kaseeling. Why are these people fools? What is the mark of a fool? Anger is in their bosom. Anger finds a resting place there.

It finds a home there. What is supposed to be there? Well, anger is preceded by trouble. I wish I could give you all the great passages on this verb for troubled.

This is, for example, Daniel chapter 4, verse 2. I'll just give you a couple of these. Daniel 4, verse 16. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast's mind be given to him.

Let seven periods of time pass over him. It is sometimes used with the idea of haste. You're troubled and it makes you do rash things.

You become rash because you're troubled. You're unsettled and your judgment deserts you. Well, if you allow this status in your spirit for very long, anger is going to find a resting place.

It's going to unseat that which is supposed to find a dwelling place. In a nutshell, Proverbs 14.33 is the contrast to this verse. Proverbs 14.33. Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, but in the bosom of fools it is made known.

That's what it says in the New American Standard. So there's a contrast between what's in the bosom of fools and what's in the heart or bosom of one who has understanding. Wisdom is going to rest there.

I think your New American Standard, I mean your New King James Standard in Proverbs 14.33 says, wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known. Well, what is in the heart of fools? It's anger. It's that troubled spirit.

They cover it with this temporary laughter and temporary singing of songs, but there is instability. There is the rudderless ship that is blown by every wind of doctrine. So that is to be avoided.

All of these are illustrations of how you can lose the benefits of wisdom. Wisdom is the key to latching on to that which is permanent. Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry.

Do not take hold of ill-gotten gain and ruin your heart. Do not say in verse 10, why is it that the beginning of days were better than these? Guess what the word is for beginning of days? Rosh, that which was at the beginning, that which came first. He's just got through saying the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning.

So don't go back and say the beginning of days were better than these. It is not from wisdom that you inquire about this. This is not the question that wisdom asks.

Why is it that the beginning days were better than these? He doesn't even address whether the beginning days were better than these. He says wisdom doesn't ask that question. Wisdom doesn't look back and say, oh, back when I was a plebe, or back when I was a warrior, back in the good old days, you know, we did it this way.

Wisdom does not inquire about this. Why? Wisdom does not look backward. Wisdom looks forward.

Wisdom says, how am I going to measure up at the end? I can't change the past, be it good or

bad. I can learn lessons, certainly, from my experience. But wisdom is going to dwell on, how will I measure up? Am I going to be the one with the long spirit, or am I just the one with the tall spirit? I was full of good intentions, but I never arrived at the destination.

I turned into the thorns under the kettle. I turned into the one that was made foolish. I wound up with spit running down my beard.

Do not say, why is it that the beginning days were better than these? It is not from wisdom that you inquire about this. Wisdom doesn't ask that question. Wisdom says, am I someone that has a long spirit? Am I availing myself of the grace of God? Am I doing what David does in Psalm 41? Yes, I'm in a tight spot.

Yes, people are opposing me, but I know where the answer is. I look to the Lord. I make sure that my relationship with Him is uncluttered and that there are no obstacles to my fellowship with Him.

I remind myself and Him of His promises. To those who walk in integrity, to those who look to be helpful to others in their time of need, God has promised to be helpful to them. Well, here I am.

I'm claiming His promise on that basis, and I know that He will raise me up. He will give me the power to respond appropriately, to do the requiring that needs to be done, that will be pleasing in His sight. Do not go back and say, why were the beginning days better than these? Back before these people started plotting, everything was so great.

Back before I hit this opposition, this adversity, everything was great. That's not the question that wisdom asks. Wisdom says, what do I do now? How can I stand in the last day and be judged a good and faithful servant? Well, it's a great passage for meditation.

We're going to find out the positive side in verse 11. You just glance at that. Wisdom is good with an inheritance.

Wisdom is going to be the means to the inheritance, the thing that lasts.